

OLD FIREPROOF

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BEING THE CHAPLAIN'S STORY

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(BEING THE CHAPLAIN'S STORY)

CHAPTER I

OF A CERTAIN QUESTION PUT TO ME BY MEN, AND MY ANSWER,
REMEMBERING THIS MAN

SINCE I laid down the office of Chaplain to His Majesty's Forces in the Field, and since my steps have sobered to the calm tenor of this peaceful rectory in the green heart of quiet England, many a time I have been asked if I can think that all is well with our people of to-day, and whether, casting my mind back on all the goodly deeds that ring, with such splendid repetition, from the echoing page of our high history, I can still face the future with other than grave disquiet and dark imagining. "Sir," say men, "you went through this late war; you saw things as they were being done. Tell us, then, is the man of these times a fit or a degenerate descendant of them that carved our name so high and so far across the world?"

And in reply—in reply I have made no real reply—at least, none such as would wholly fulfil my own conscience and still glibly satisfy all their perturbedness. For though it is true that we wore the war to a victory in the end, yet it is also true that there were so many details of our doings, which seemed to preach that we had won in spite of our folly and our blunderings; so much that made it seem as if God had steadfastly willed the others to fail, rather than we majestically to

win, that at first I could not answer all in an easy word and say, "Leave forebodings, leave disquiet. It is well with our race."

But now—now as the days pass, in quiet hours slow piling peace on peace; now as night brings calm-breathed slumber and the dawn new stillnesses, quietly the dust of all the doing of those years of war settles in my memory, and leaves, clear and plain and comely to the sight, some things that forbid me doubting overmuch for the wars that are to come. Faith returns, and courage, like a tide of ocean, fills to its calm rim in me. The old race is not ended yet; we are not a folk full-spent, nor shall be soon, God still helping us.

And if one ask me why at last I can speak with such trust and quiet for our future; if it is demanded of me what General I have in mind, or what piece of our men's work I think upon in speaking thus, then I answer with no name of General, neither with mention of any one of those stubborn fields that have so crowded the medal ribbon with augmenting clasps. Rather I muse on one figure of the dim thousands of that tenacious struggle, one of those seldom heard of by the public at home, but one whose image stands out in my mind ever the stronger, and the more goldenly clear, as Time pales and makes nebulous to me the outlines of those others of whom the world took such vivid count in the day of the war itself.

Most of you at home, reading the war news day by day, met the name of this particular man once or twice in a terse paragraph or so. I dare be bold and say also that not one of you have remembered it. It figured in the lists of those mentioned in despatches, and in the further lists of those to whom special medals were awarded, yet only as a thousand other names likewise appeared. A quarter of a million men, newly home from the war, might have been questioned man by man, and not one of them have ever heard of him. Nay, were I to set forth in detail his whole career out yonder, only a few thousands at farthest would recognise the man I mean. But more than one General of division, more than one column commander, remembers him keenly, tone and look and manner to the quick.

And, far flung across the seven seas, scattered to the four corners of the world, some few hundred men there are who will never forget—sinful, erring, hardy men, who in their last hour on this earth will still see him as one who was to them more than a leader, more than a friend, more even than a great strength; they will still see him as one who was all that atmosphere that comes goldenly up whenever their memory dreams on his name again—not his Christian name, neither the surname he drew with his blood from the long line of his forefathers, but the name wherewith they themselves invested him, the name they never used in the hearing of outsiders, the name so much their own that, as I believe, he himself never heard of it. And that name—oh, foolish fond! oh, breath of reckless men!—that name was but “Old Fireproof.”

Yet to those men that name connoted all that God intended when He said, “Let us make man,” and even when they spoke of him to me, a chaplain, they seemed not conscious that any part of him might need excuse. Nor have I ever thought that that was any consequence of what happened at my first meeting with them. Rather it seemed that the sinful thing I did then, grievous as it was in one of Christ’s ministers, did but cause them to take me into a delicate comradeship, wherein they could speak to me out of their vividest flash of thought instead of guardedly as to an outsider. Nay, strange thing as it may seem to say it, that which I thought should have ruined me for ever in their eyes left them but holding me instead as the one man who should or could be chaplain to a squadron commanded by such a captain as theirs.

Moreover, I know that they also understood how in truth it was that very backsliding of mine, which made me shrink from taking the post of chaplain to the column of which they were a famous part. They had seen repentance quick in me, with shame covering me like a garment, and in the troubledness of their hearts for me they had so borne themselves that I said to my quivering soul, “These, maugre the outward forms, be Christian gentlemen.”

And, again, it was their hero—fittingly, as they would have

said—who, after he had first spoken the movingly simple thought which so marvellously comforted me, turned my eyes to the light again, there as I stood in grief. “Sir,” he said—he was captain, yet he gave me the courtesy of the “sir” in grave reverence for my grief—“sir, you may be glad of one thing in this. If from now on you should ever find yourself ministering to this squadron, you will be able to speak to the men wholeheartedly and to the uttermost word of longing, for they have seen how troubled you are when you think you have done the thing you should not have done. They know now that you have felt it all, and therefore that you can understand. But remember, too, that we all think that what you did was nowise out of place. We would not have it altered now it is done. We think it was but the natural man coming out, in a moment that strips all men to the core.”

“And the natural man is evil—very evil,” I answered, speaking hardly in the bitterness of my repentance.

“Nay,” he said gently, a wonderful smile the while lighting all his face to marvellous softness, “I have not found it so; I have not found it fail yet that, if I take men on their nobler side, I may do as I will with them. And glad—in their secret hearts they are gladdened by it, having a happiness in any man who ranks them as on the side of things of good repute. The truest things draw men like gold when they are in their truest mood.”

At that noble protest I paused, looking at him, as it were, in a slow awakening. Much I had heard of him, splendid things, covetable things in a leader of men. But not in this light had the speakers pictured him. It had been told me that his squadron was made up of all that was refused by the other squadron-captains—men reckless and headlong, fearing neither God nor man, so common repute spoke of them. Little marvel if I stood silent for a moment, pondering upon some words wherewith to answer him.

And while I halted thus, he stretched his hand to mine. “I cannot stay just now,” he said; “I must ride over to the other troops yonder. And you will soon come to the quiet again con-

cerning what happened here ; of that there is no doubt. Till I see you again then——”

So he turned and went, and I was left to consider anew the thing I had done, inquiring into it by the new light he had thrown upon it when he said that it would be an aid to me in dealing with these men. And because I could not at that moment but have the gravest doubt as to whether it were so or not, and because, too, it is an ever-continuing astonishment with me, and an ever-present help, even to this day, to consider how goodly his words sounded, I will here begin by setting out before you all my transgression as it happened, that you may judge this man's words in their full context, and feel for yourselves whether he was a man great in speaking a great truth, or but courteous in striving to comfort one whom he saw in trouble.

Yet before I go on to my own case, it behoves me to say that not alone men, whether commanders or commanded, remember, and will continue to remember, this man as a figure of the vividest. Two women there are also who see this life, this world, Time, Death—yea, and Eternity itself, stretching before them all of none aspect save as they are seen through passionate remembrance of this same man. But, being women, their cases are not, nor could have been, so simple as the cases of men, and so cannot be summed up in a sentence, but must be set out further on, at such length as may be needed to give what an outsider may know of such cases. The story of such a case can never be more than partially known and told by one not party to it, and therefore can never lie at the judgment of beholders. Between woman and a man there is but one judge—Infinite God. Love is a passion, of itself so infinite of mood and manner, of aspects and of possibilities, that less than the Infinite cannot truly (and therefore dare not) judge it.

Thus, I will not take upon myself to say, “Lo, this was right!” or “Behold, that was wrong!” Rather I will try to keep soberly to quiet record of as much as could be clearly seen or heard. If the two women were to tell their tales, each her own, doubtless the result would leave my plain account beggared of all

countenance, if not, indeed, seeming as it were a tale told of some other happening. But they cannot. Neither of them would or could suffer to have her soul so stripped naked for all folk to watch and weigh, and therefore my tale must stand for all that can be known of their parts in this man, this hero of more tales than mine—"Old Fireproof."

CHAPTER II

OF THE MEN WHO WERE LIKE TO THE MEN OF EPHRAIM

IT had so befallen that for one trek it was my fortune to be attached to a column which was not famous for any great thing accomplished against the enemy. It seemed to me, coming upon me in the slow days of my marching with that column, that fear of a reverse, and a determination to avoid it, so rode the mind of the commander of the column that no room was left for any thought of resolutely seeking victory. All his thoughts turned to defence, none to offence. It was as if he looked on each fresh trek as a fresh danger to which blind Fate doomed him, from which to escape alive and whole was the one great thing, the thing to be bought at any cost soever of thought and plan and vigil. It is true, and grievous it is that it should be true, that this column was not conspicuously alone in suffering from this strange atrophy of the nobler vision of a soldier's duty. Doubtless this disquieting failure of the eyes to lift to the heights of ideal attempts was one of the chief causes of the undue prolongation of the war. But, for the chastisement of my overhaste to blame, let me remember what the man of whom I am to write said to me afterwards. "It is that men get stale. It is that flesh and blood get worn out, and the brain, numbed by long wearinesses and sodden with endless happenings, loses its ethers; loses its golden rays of virility. It is that men want rest and a renewed inspiration. That is all."

I did not answer him with the first word that came to my lips. How could I? How could I say to him, "And you? When had you rest since the day the war began?"? It was his

wondrous gentleness for men's failings that spoke. Shall a goodly soul speak other than good things?

Here, too, I should set down another of his lightning sayings repeated to me long afterwards. "Troops are what their leaders make them." The words flashed within my mind as I heard them, graving themselves there for ever as a truth. Well had I seen the proof of it in this trek of which I speak, where the spirit of the commander spread like a dull pestilence upon the column, eating out all other life, driving out all virility of atmosphere and all initiative. Every man seemed like his leader, starting the march with dread that he should be dead, and ending it with huge thankfulness that he had escaped this time, too.

The day of which I wish to speak seemed the culmination of our wanderings for that trek, whether by the original design of the expedition at setting out, or by decision then suddenly taken, I know not. But I remember how each man looked at his fellow and said "Ah!" in his relief when, at the reading of orders the night before, it was found that we were to turn towards the railway next morning.

All this cast me down greatly. I was new to column work. All I knew of war was that I had till now been chaplain to one of the great base hospitals in Cape Colony, and that there, out of the books I had read on war, I had talked much to the men brought down from the front, who had replied to me very courteously. In this new light on things as they really happened, however, I had no word to say, and in the next two days spoke little to any man, keeping my own company to a sad extent, riding alone for hours in troubledness of soul.

Not thus had I dreamed we should return, our ambulances filled with our own wounded only, certain graves lonely behind us on the feldt, and for all boast the boast that we had not been broken and destroyed. Nay, in truth, it was become a question whether even this last poor boast would remain to us. So bold were the Boers grown towards us that they had hung like wolves upon our flanks continually from the moment of our turning, and this night, for all so near as we were to the railway, they pressed

us till it was full dark, whereby the flashes of their rifles began to show where they lay thickest, at which our guns found a mark, and so with shrapnel dispersed their swarms till we had ease again. But the nearness had so shaken our commander that he sent a painful message in to the General at the railway town, hoping for some help to secure him through the last stage of his return.

Dawn brought the fire afresh, not as any sniping now, but in a swelling volume, that sounded ominous of coming disaster. Fear had given us some help, however, in that camp was already struck, the waggons loaded and drawn out, and all men in position before the day broke.

I did not notice the rising of the sun, that moment which on other days had seemed so solemn and so splendid. In the seeming oncoming of vast Death, all commanding in its dread majesty of voice, what man could think of usual and accustomed things? The rifle fire drew nearer and more crashing every minute. I seemed to be aware of men's faces greyer than I remembered them before. I seemed to hear words go whispering, muttering, catching, where, as I had looked, there should have been only the grimest concentration of tenacity. And the shouting of the captains, that in the splendour of Job's imagery should have rung across the din, came out chill with anxiety and petty with petulant excitement. Even our fire in answer sounded incoherent, as if shaky fingers let off shots in gasping confusion.

Then men began to roll over and the doctors to be busy. Other men's eyes looked at the wounded fearfully, that should have had no glance for anything but the work in hand. Though I fell to my own work, yet I, too, found mine ear straining and mine eye roving for the first certainty of the imminent disaster. The Colonel rode near, and his face was the greyest there, seeming to shine with a leaden greyness from under the skin. This man's presence should have been help; his voice should have crystallized all this looseness into power. But help he was none—nay, he was only hurt instead.

"Sir," said the wounded man under my hand, "hark to

him! Not an order to give, not a word to say, and him in command!"

Yet within a little while he did speak. "I'm afraid we'll have to abandon the waggons." Aloud he spoke it, speaking to himself, and yet letting all men hear. And at the words all men within hearing turned to look at him, till our fire there almost ceased. "Surely," thought I, "we are undone now."

Then in that breath a sudden great stillness fell upon the enemy, a great hush that held for many heart-beats, and I heard one whisper rise bodingly: "They must be coming; the Boers must be coming now."

Thereupon the whole world of the enemy in front burst into a crash of rifles, as if some one, instant, supreme moment challenged them, too. But no bullet came our way. Not at us were they firing; and while our line remained silent the Colonel spoke joyfully: "That must be Rostron's column come. Now we'll get the waggons through the neck while the Boers are attending to them."

If he spoke further than those shameful words I did not hear it. I was looking to our right front, where a few horsemen—words cannot convey how few they seemed to me in that moment—were heading, headlong as fox-hunters and straight as hounds, at the Boer position. Farther off, a larger number of horsemen—yet still how piteous few!—were swinging in to come upon the rear of the Boers, and I was aware of more than one voice near me saying: "How they are going! how they are charging!"

So few! so few! and so monstrous and loud-roaring the fire into the heart of which they headed! I marked how they shot from the hand as they rode, but over all I marked how one figure, the figure that led them, the one that was a full fifty yards ahead of the swiftest, that figure of a man indeed, rode stooping forward, bareheaded, his raised right hand grasping aloft a carbine, whereon a bayonet flashed in the flashing of the risen sun. Here was the captain of Scripture, here was the beloved of painters, here was hope and help and strength,

inspiration—nay, very victory, save for God's veto. My heart sent up a cry acclaiming him, though with it, too, went a prayer to God's mercy that He would not let such splendour be quenched in my sight. "See him!" cried the men about me; "*see him!*"

And in that moment the Boer position was become silent. Quiet as death were all the crests that had been so fierce a bare breath past. On the highest ridge I saw the leader halt and leap down, with all the troop as it came up leaping down beside him and bursting into a chorus of fire that I well pictured was pouring demoralization into the flying foe. Beyond them the further troop of fox-hunters had gone on from sight, but in a breath more a louder burst of fire told us that they, too, had reached their point, and were emptying their magazines after the enemy. All that black danger, which like a nightmare had lifted with vast, boding wings to envelop and destroy us; all that danger, like a nightmare, was gone, even as the terrors of black dreams do vanish in the glad breath of waking. Little marvel if I pondered upon the seed in man's soul which could produce such different men as that leader yonder in front and this other behind. How should such opposite men wear the same uniform, serve the same Commander-in-Chief, and claim the same Imperial inheritance!

But the fire of those who had cleared the Boers away lasted not long, only, as it seemed, while each man might fire twenty or thirty shots, yet when, in the silence that ensued, I turned to see what our Colonel would do next, I found that he was gone, and the men about me were mounting. Glad at that, I mounted too, for now I hoped that we should move forward far enough to let me speak with those good fighting men, whose gallant work had so changed the light for us. Judge, then, of my amazement when I found we were leaving the field altogether, all as though the day no longer concerned us, and as though we were but to take up again our huddled, driven march into the railway, continuing the retreat as though no gallant feat of arms had been done, and as though God had wrought no marvel in our favour. I was not pleased.

And it seemed so discourteous and ungentlemanly. It was as though a man in peaceful England should fall into deadly jeopardy, and, being rescued at death's risk by some passing stranger, should then rise, resume his hat, and pass on his way again without the courtesy of a single word to his preserver.

And while I marvelled, and while we marched—being then some two hundred yards upon our churlish way—up to our Captain dashed a rider from the men who had rescued us. Crisp iron-grey was his hair as it showed below his hat, steel-grey his eye, bronze his face, and resolute his look. All the colonial was in him as he rode and reined in. Goodly his horse, too—a brown with the white flecks that mark a good Africander horse, and horse and man looked two halves of one effective whole, bringing, as it were, a waft of a new world, a breath of iron readiness into the brow-beaten atmosphere of ours.

"Sir," he cried to the Captain—and as I heard the adamant tone of his voice my heart lifted to him—"sir, there is a surrounding movement going on, and it depends on you holding fast to this ridge you were on. The rest of our column is coming in from the other side, and we are to have the whole of the Boers bagged fast in a few minutes more if you stay and keep this ridge."

All one sarcastic petulance was the Captain in answer. "Colonel H—— commands this column. I've no doubt he'll obey any orders he may get from a sergeant-major of Rostron's Horse. Yonder he goes. But my orders are to retire on that next ridge. I'm obeying them."

I watched the sergeant-major's face whiten under the check, and while he held his tongue to choose his words, the Colonel himself came galloping back to us, shouting petulantly even before he reached us: "Trot! Why don't you trot? Why do you come at a walk when the waggons are not yet through?"

The Captain hastily cried "Trot!" and all the squadron swung into a canter after him. But the sergeant-major galloped across to the Colonel and repeated to him the information he had given

the Captain, so that now I looked that some heed would be paid to what might be done and won. But, no ; it was but the worse. "Yes, I've heard all that !" he cried. "But you people were sent out here to help me get my waggons through that neck, not to ramp about and get the whole thing into a mess. I'm not going to lose my waggons." A little while ago he had quietly said that he would abandon those waggons. Now he was mad to get them away when the danger was done. I could preach an interminable sermon on the strangeness of man, with that one episode for my text.

As a man who has come upon that which is beyond words, the sergeant-major wheeled his horse from before the Colonel and started slowly back for his own people again. I had drawn rein to watch him in his attempt to rouse the cravens, all my heart with him in his errand. I held rein now till he should pass me, my soul burning with his in its wrath at this end of it all, and in my mind the words of Holy Writ ringing as I thought of these others, "Like to the men of Ephraim, who, being harnessed and bearing bows, turned themselves back in the day of battle."

As this man came near, and as he saw me plainly waiting, he lifted his face full to mine, and I saw him all grey now of face and lips, as well as eyes and hair. Dumb with wrath he rode, nearing me, till something stirred me to speak.

"Can you tell me what will happen now ?" I asked, gently as I could fashion.

"I can," he said. "The Boers will get away. Nine hundred men will curse this column and all its mothers and fathers, and two commandoes will mock it. Such a chance as we had ; a better we'll never get. And all wasted, and the fighting still to do will be wasted, too ; the dead men still to be killed will be dead for nothing. The Boers will just slip through this gap now, and we're done."

I turned my horse and rode beside him, tongue-tied, for I could not tell what to say.

"Hear it ! they've begun !" he cried, as a great din of battle rose far on the other side. "And there's the guns—hear them !

And all for nothing—all wasted ! But I'll get back to the troop," he ended, pressing the spurs to his horse.

I, too, lifted to a canter, but then I felt my blood cringe as my companion turned his grey face towards the retreating squadron and the inglorious Colonel, bursting forth in his rage.

"You bastard ! you bastard's blood !"

Oh ! the passion of the man as he rang it forth !

CHAPTER III

OF THE KOP THAT WE NAMED ICHABOD'S KOP, AND OF MY GRIEVOUS TRANSGRESSION THERE

THE whole man in this grey sergeant-major stirred me to the deeps, drawing the man in me out to follow the man in him. As his horse quickened pace, so I quickened the pace of mine ; but he was far too bold a rider for me to keep up with him. Nevertheless, as fast as I could go I went, feeling that the real world was here in front where these men held the crest they had just won.

But when I reached that crest, behold, my heart stood still with astonishment to see how like to lazy tramps at home, sunning themselves on the slope of some common, these men were. Here one passed his tobacco to another ; there one lit his pipe, while another thrust forward, waiting for the heel of the match wherewith to light his, too. Here one munched a biscuit, there one dozed. They were of all ages—from sixteen to sixty, as I afterwards proved, and sixteen was in each case the care and comrade of sixty : grey sixty lying with a smile and suddenly seizing sixteen with a great grasp on the neck to make him cease his jesting and rest, as the old sheep-dog bowls over the barking pup to teach him wisdom.

Of many guises, too, they were. Each man seemed to wear what bandoliers he thought fittest for his strength and habit of body, as, for instance, two crossed upon the chest, or two, one above the other, round his hips and waist. Others, again, wore one over the chest and one round the hips, just whatever way seemed good to them. Likewise many had, in addition, neat

rows of cartridges stuck in the top fold of the puttees, handy to the practised fingers. Some had bayonets, some none, and whoso had a bayonet carried it as he listed, save always that none wore any bayonet belt. The commonest way was through the two top folds of the puttee, as a Highlander in gala dress carries his skene. But over all, ruling all, was the fact that every man lay just where his eye chose as best for firing from. It needed but a word, a glance at an enemy seen, and this line would be grim iron again—a line of death.

But, as I say, the mellowness of tramps at rest was over them all. Barely a lazy word was passing with them. Their eyes, red with the watching of the night ride, looked out with quiet steadiness at whatsoever drew their gaze. Battle seemed as if it would be less than the echo of an old-told tale to these masters of battle work.

Then their horses, patient in groups just below and behind them. Many fashions of saddles they wore, and strange were the cooking-pots and beakers that hung on some of them. But the animals themselves looked well content, as if they were the friends of good masters and providers. Truly I had come into another air, where everything breathed of self-reliance and of virile independence of thought in compassing one great end, instead of the crimped and patterned results of the atrophied intelligence of those men of Ephraim retiring yonder.

The sergeant-major had dismounted and told his tale to an officer, who thereupon mounted and pressed away at a gallop towards the farther troops, which were not to be seen. I saw no other officer here, therefore this was a troop, left occupying an important position, with the roar of fighting drawing nearer every moment, and yet without officers. Disaster should be imminent here, but as I looked along the line I saw only lazy enjoyment of the few minutes of rest. One sergeant alone seemed to concern himself. He spoke to the sergeant-major drawlingly :

“Where’s the Captain off to this time, Tom?”

“To send word to the Colonel and to get hold of the other three troops and change their work, because these bastards we came out to help won’t stay and take a hand to make a job of

it. We'll have to do what we can without them. If it gets thick before the Captain gets back, we're to go across to that ridge these old hens have just left, and one of the other troops will come here and hold this. But we're too thin a line. We'll hardly do more than give them a shake up, unless the Lord God gives us luck."

My mind paused again. Was this, then, the language of battle as used by men who did stout things daily? The few who listened seemed to snort contemptuously at the mention of the "old hens," but the rest seemed to find it all as they expected, even when the sergeant-major spoke again. "I think somebody had better go across to that ridge, and pick the best spot for the job. Corporal Knight, you take three or four fellows and go over yonder, and see which spot gives the best front, the way the Boers will come if they get put this way."

The corporal rose, took his pipe out of his mouth, and tersely named four men, who stood to their feet nonchalantly and followed him to their horses. The five mounted and went.

"Keep an eye this way, and, if I wave my hat, come in again," said the sergeant-major to the corporal at parting.

"Right!" answered the corporal.

Was this the way battle was controlled—by sergeants and corporals? Hardly a lieutenant in the column I had just left would have dared detach a party like this on his own initiative; certainly no captain would have been allowed to decide for himself what moment "it" should become "too thick."

The crashing of the fighting beyond, far in our front, grew wider and louder. I spoke to no one, but watched the effect on these men, striving to judge if it stirred them to any solemnity of thought in that they were master-men of this craft wherein God forges the fate of nations—the supremest craft on earth, to the awful arbitrament of which the whole world must bend its neck, following where battle has compelled. For statesmanship, strategy, foresight, noble dreams of future good, titanic schemes of dealing with the human race, eagle-pinioned ambition panting to weld and wield the world—all, all must in the culmination abide the test of battle.

All the noblest as well as the vilest of human movements and aspirations lie to this touchstone of battle. Is a nation great and proud? Bring it to the touch of battle, and, behold! unless it abide the shock, its glory and its greatness are but an added spoil and a prey to its enemies. Battle wielders are the supreme lords of earth under God. The ultimate measure of a nation's strength and standing in the world is but the measure of its strength in the day of battle. And these men were players of the red game—veterans of no mean record. Should they not, then, stand stiff with pride of the flesh, or shine with exaltation of the spirit? I looked and I saw nothing in them to mark the coming conflict, save only that one or two cleaned out their rifles, or broke the string of a packet of cartridges to re-fill their bandoliers.

Then I saw that one or two of the sergeants and corporals looked at the sergeant-major. That grey figure looked from them to where the corporal had gone on the one hand, and to where the Captain had gone on the other.

"Yes," he said at length; "we'll stand to our horses now."

A sergeant took the word.

"Stand to your horses!" He seemed to be merely calling the attention of the men to something they might do, and, behold, every man was on his feet obeying. Then the troops to which the Captain had gone were heard bursting into fire.

"Mount!" came the word, grim and compelling, from the sergeant-major.

Up swung every man to the saddle.

"Come on, now," went on the sergeant-major, leading the way at a walk, as if he would go over and join the corporal.

But in that moment the corporal and his four men had mounted, too. I looked, and saw that they were in open order, riding with gathering pace as if to cross our front towards the greatest din, their hats and rifles motioning us to head that way too.

"They see something!" cried the sergeant-major, keeping his eye on them. "All right, boys; come this way, then. Right wheel; and can—ter!"

At the word we obeyed, and in a long, swinging canter surged forward into what seemed the indefinite feldt. I lifted my eyes, and saw scattered horsemen coming towards us, here and there one or two, here and there three or four. Our hoof-beats grew to thunder, and I saw those riders check. Some of them leaped down to fire, some turned to flee another way, some threw up their hands.

Bullets made fearful sounds past us. Mad voices burst out all about me, exultant, roaring, blaring forth furious oaths, some yelling desperate orders, some savage suggestions. The fire crashed upon us from where the ground rose in front, and fire from every man right and left of me banged forth in answer. The scattered horsemen I had seen were swallowed up in our racing mass, one or two being slain lying, one or two slain flying, one or two taken prisoners in answer to the piteous appeal of their uplifted hands, and still our pace stretched itself faster, till it seemed a bolt of frenzied speed, as if each horse were as mad as each man to be first in that awful race.

I could no longer breathe; all the air in all the world seemed whistling against my face and past my ears, and, while I gasped and panted, all in one stride, as it were, we rose upon the ridge, where two or three forms of men lying motionless seemed monstrously quiet to my staring eyes. But there was no time to think. All the men were leaped to the ground in fury and were blazing away with mad heat into a loose crowd of mounted men just in front and below us, seemingly caught in the very act of riding easily for this ridge; a crowd wherein some of the figures seemed to halt curiously, some to weave about in and out amongst the rest, and still others to break off from the mass and quest hither and thither in the empty space aside.

Bullets from them were still making all the air throb. The sergeant-major, like a demon possessed, was dashing one or two of the men down to make them lie flat like the rest and shoot steadily from cover, yelling furiously at them to aim at some one man and to shoot low and shoot slow, using such words as makes my flesh cringe now to remember, and in that while I noticed that there began to be more bare ground between us and those

horsemen yonder. "They are giving way," said a quiet, small voice inside me, and at that moment one dark, fierce face on my left turned up to the sergeant-major, yelling and yelling again: "Let us charge! Let us charge into them!"

The sergeant-major's voice burst back with a threat so awful as should have turned my blood to clots, but which only made my flesh burn instead. "We are not here to just kill a few!" he roared; "we are here to bag the lot! That's Old Fireproof's last word," finished he, as if in that quotation he laid down a Law of the Universe.

Instant on the words the whole troop burst into new chorus: "Here they come! Here's the whole pile of them! We'll be threading them half a dozen on every bullet if they get much thicker!" How thin and inept the words must seem, to the layman, to be the words of fierce fighters at a moment of such crisis; but in truth such moments are not met by any loftiness of words, but only by burning passion of words; volcanic passion of will to win; grim passion of stubborn refusal to be beaten; of desperate, roaring determination to fight and fight, and to die fighting, but win.

And verily "desperate" did seem to be the over-word of it all for our case just then, for the world in front of us looked to darken suddenly, from edge to edge of it, with men in loose order, moving with weird, smooth haste, streaming this way, converging this way, one steadily coming front that gathered in those who were falling back before us and brought them forward to roll them all upon us in a Juggernaut advance.

Shells fell amongst the mass, coughing up little volcanoes of earth and fire, brown and red. Shrapnel puffed out sudden little fleeces of delicate white smoke high above it, the earth beneath answering as suddenly with sweeps of spurted dust to the slanted hail of the outcrashed leaden balls. Shell and shrapnel were driving this loosened mass of men upon us, adding desperation to whatever of courage was already in it, and, as my rushing mind realized that, my brain seemed, as it were, to dilate to rigidity with the feeling that this wide host of horsemen was sweeping upon us with myriad hoofs to trample us into the very dust of the

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earth, for in all the whirl of thoughts then clamouring in my mind there was not one to nudge me that we might mount and ride for it, while there was still time to get away. Fight, not flight, was all the thought that moment brought in the company of those men about me. And then I found that our fire had ceased : I felt the knowledge of it in wonder.

My eyes went right and left, and I perceived that the grey sergeant-major had given an order. The men were to open the breech-blocks of their rifles, and let the chambers cool a little, while they refilled their magazines to the tenth cartridge. Next, open order was taken, ten feet more or less from man to man, according to the ground, that we might hold as wide a front as so few men could stretch ; and all this time, like a wide billow of black sea swooping across the yellow sands, the enemy were surging towards us.

From that black front I looked again along our line, but now, instead of marking how few we were, I found my breast heave with a sudden expansion, as if my lungs caught in a great breath of exaltation and not mere air, for all I saw to right and left was not the fewness of our men, but how their eyes were kindling with the battle-light—that light ! that light !—and how their faces, even as they lay, seemed thrust forward with locked jaw, the nostril wide and widening still, the tanned skin shining with a film like the gleam of the bayonets some of them fixed. The soul of every man seemed bent to the uttermost ether of it, not on wounds and death to themselves, but fiercely forward to hammer these men in front back from this ridge in ruin ; not desperately to hammer them, but proudly, lordlily, gloryingly, as if the sheer assertion of their mastery over any enemy whatsoever were the very breath of their nostrils ; and my heart rose at the thought of what a leader he must be who had brought these men to such a pitch as this, which only the long habit of triumph could have sealed in them. And as I thought of him, that Captain, as I had seen him leading the charge this morning, and as I saw him now through this bearing of his men, a thrill went through me. Relief from all the shame of these two days past rushed upon me in a storm that shook my soul from sober-

ness, lifting me up beyond control with the thought of how splendid it must be to ride in battle under such a leader—and then, just then; “Now!” cried a great voice out of the mouth of the sergeant-major, “now pump it into them and to hell with them.” In one crash our fire broke forth.

But oh! so few we were—so few men, so few rifles, and those men coming yonder were so many! Fury seized me that we might not stop this mass after all. A flame scorched me, eye and vein and brain, a rage that we might perhaps die like tigers smothered by the hordes of the deer; a rage that frenzied me till in that rage I forgot God, forgot God’s ministry, remembered no more the solemn ceremony which had set me aside from sinful passions, consecrating me holy to do the work of Christ, remembered nothing but this crash of battle and all the challenge that roared in it.

Like a man demented I raged, the rifle of a wounded man in my hands, shooting and shouting, goading men to kill, my own hands doing the work of killing, my raving lips bursting forth the awful oaths and curses which my soul still shudders at, albeit such words seem to come so natural to fighting men at such a moment. I was no more than a wild beast of fang and claw. Like a devil possessed of devils did I rage.

I remember as in some dreadful dream how near that black mass of men came to us. I remember how long it seemed to hang irresolute just in front, vomiting crackling bullets at us. And I remember—almost raging again in the remembering—how, after a desperate minute, it slowly swung and streamed round our left, taking a line which would have led it to death or surrender had that coward column yonder not gone cringing off to get its trumpery waggons to some bootless place or other. In that moment, while that crowd of the foe were slipping past us, I think we roared like Bedlamites in maniac rage to see them so escape, though we were still slanting bullets into them as far as we could reach them. Then they dipped behind a ridge some two miles away—out of sight, out of danger, out of all hope of our capturing them—escaped!

At that we seemed to fall to silence for a full long minute,

staring sullenly after the vanished Boers, till a voice broke forth from one of the men in his bitterness, "Ichabod's us! Ichabod's our name this day, for yonder goes the glory from our hopes."

"Nay," spoke the sergeant-major furiously, bitterness raging in his tone, "that's the wrong way of the word. We're no Ichabod. Ichabod's the word for that damnable column yonder, sent out to fight, and now huddling itself into a waggon-guard. Ichabod's the word for them, or Ichabod's the word for the pride we used to have in our breed. But not for Rostron's column, not for D Squadron of ours, not for this troop."

"Still," returned the man's voice stubbornly, "there's Ichabod in this day for us. When we think of it we'll think of Ichabod, and when we want to talk about it it's the spot that was Ichabod we'll call it. Ichabod's Kop then; that's the name of it in our minds. Ichabod's Kop it is."

CHAPTER IV

OF THE DARKNESS THAT FELL UPON ME, AND OF THE SIMPLE
WORDS THAT LIFTED ME TO THE LIGHT AGAIN

I CHABOD, and Ichabod, and Ichabod again. This iteration and reiteration of the word seemed to call me to myself like one out of a trance, though as yet it did not burn itself into my consciousness as it was to do before the day was many minutes older. For the moment I did but look round, seeing that the men were in all sorts of attitudes about me—some re-filling bandoliers, some tying up wounded comrades, some re-charging their pipes, some riding from man to man of those figures of the enemy dotting the feldt in front and flank of us. But no longer cheery, any man of them; dark burned every face amongst them, for they were growling, as wolves cheated of their prey. If the bitter things they snarled forth about that coward column could but have reached it, the officers of it must have cowered in their saddles for very shame. And while they raged sulkily, and while my eye roved vacantly to and fro, suddenly every man's eye seemed to lift to some object behind me, so that presently I also looked that way, and was aware of a troop of riders coming slowly back towards us, as if from chasing the flying foe.

Leading that troop rode the officer who had gone away from the first position, the one I had heard spoken of as Captain, and my eye left all the rest and watched only him, to read him to the very soul if it might, that thereby it should come at the secret of him.

Whether I saw what I looked to see I do not remember now, for I did not note it then, being all too busy with the things I did see to mark whether or wherein it differed from any dream I may have fashioned of him. Handsome was the first thing that I marked, and yet but vaguely, though it was a handsomeness that had as a distinction the large, long eye one may see in medieval pictures. For, over all, handsome as he was, yet the one dominant note of him was mental strength, a mentality that was all one will to prevail, like the molten steel which, splashing from the furnace caldron, burns its way relentlessly along its course, be that course straight or winding. And of strong passions, too, I saw he was, for his clean-shaven face was dark with wrath, though his lips were set in stern quiet above it.

Yet—and here was the man—at the coming of his dark face every man on the ridge seemed to break into sudden sunshine, clustering about the grey sergeant-major, and striding down with him to meet their hero with boyish smiles, while even the wounded could not forbear, but turned their eyes towards him, let their pain bite as it might.

And, behold, as his eyes met the eyes of these his men, straightway the darkness passed from his face, wrath and disgust were forgotten, while, like as a father might welcome goodly sons from some great honour, so came he to meet these men that had so lately raged so like to devils, and now strode and clustered so like to eager boys—frankly shone the happiness in their faces, and frankly it shone in his.

When I looked at his face I did not wonder at their eager eyes; when I looked at their eyes I did not marvel at the happiness of his, nor at the tone and ring of his voice as he broke out:

“Gentlemen, I saw it all. They can’t say it was my doing this time. They’ll have to admit that I’m right when I talk about the squadron. It was fine, boys, it was fine! I saw how you rode for this ridge, and how you kept it afterwards when all the drove of them seemed like swallowing you up, ridge and all. It was D-Squadron fashion all over—old D Squadron again!”

And at that word there rose a clamorous shout like a triumphant war-cry from all the men of both troops: "D Squadron again! Old D! Old D first and the rest nowhere!"

Softly smiled the Captain at the din, and then turned his eyes to the sergeant-major.

"Sergeant-major," he said, "I never worried as to how you'd handle the troop if things did get hot; but even so I'm glad at the way you did do it—it was so absolutely the right thing that you did."

The sergeant-major was uneasy at a breath, as if he had been accused of something. "If only that jackal of a column had just stayed and showed a front!" he retorted.

"That column! Those miserable wretches!" answered the Captain, taking a great breath and pausing on the thought before he changed it. Then as he dismounted, his voice came out softer still: "But which of us got it this time?"—whereby he was asking which of the men had been hit.

At once the troops broke into voice again, giving him the names of comrades who were down, and keeping him company as he strode towards where the wounded had been laid together in a place where there were no stones.

As he walked I watched him, and here again I know not whether he was the bodily figure I had pictured. I only know that I felt no shock of disappointment, for as I looked I said to myself that had he been at Oxford in my day he would have been seized upon as the ideal figure for the mile over hurdles, while in the football-field he might well have gained his cap. His mind here, however, was bent on his wounded, and he was no sooner come to them than down he knelt, and I, from where I sat, could hear the gallant words that fell from his lips—words that were as wine to the wounded men, for they were rousing words, bidding them be of good cheer, for now they had the sealed proof of their honour to show in those red slots upon their bodies. The unwounded listened as well as the wounded, and I, stealing unconsciously nearer, listened as eagerly as the eagerest, till presently, by the way of his awakening words, my own soul came back within me, and I remembered, as if a light-

ning stroke suddenly split the numbness of my mind, that it was I who should have been kneeling with those wounded men, speaking the heartening words of Christ's own comfort to them, those words of ancient gentleness and reverent love for poor humanity that now, upon remembrance, came ringing into my ears like the golden chimes of some lost land of peace—some land wherein I once had walked, and where I now must walk no more for ever. Yea, I was a chaplain, and it was my great duty to go yonder, and now—now at the moment of my duty—I dared not move, for behold, mine hands were hot yet from the work of shedding blood—I was unclean !

“Unclean ! unclean ! unclean !” The word of the prophet rang in my soul against me till I covered my face with my hands and stumbled apart from the rest, and cast me down upon the ground in utter misery of repentance, ay, and of dread, too ; for like hot irons through my stretched soul came the remembrance of the awful oaths and curses I had roared forth in the fight. Dumbly and dazedly I was repeating to myself that Christ would have no more of such a one as I. Whether men demanded that I should resign from the ministry or not, Christ would still be done with me. If I groaned aloud in my despair, or if it were but my action in throwing myself down I cannot say, but presently here were two men stooping over me, and one of them touched me on the shoulder, saying :

“Sir, are you hit?”

“No,” I said hopelessly, lifting my face and looking at him despairingly.

“Ah ! you're white—you're a bit sick,” he said cheeringly. “But that'll pass ; you'll soon be all right. We told the Captain how you rode with us, and how you fought, and he laughed and said he wanted another lieutenant, if you'd only drop the cross for the star. Sir, you'll be all right in a minute or two.”

Those words that so praised my sin burnt me to the bone, so that I could not forbear, but cried out :

“Oh my sin ! It is my sin against Christ——”

And at that cry the two men stood upright again, and hurried

away to the Captain, as I found. For almost at once I heard a long, free stride coming towards me through the grass, and, looking up, my eyes met the eyes of the Captain looking down at me with a gentleness that drew me up to meet him, as if an inward wave had lifted me to my feet.

Swiftly my hand went out to meet his that was stretching to me in open sympathy, and as he halted, "Sir," he said, "Sir." Just that word and no more, but in its tone and tenderness there was such hope and help to my grief that straightway the tears would come from mine eyes, and I could no more see what he might be thinking.

At that he said no word, but he put his hand upon my shoulder, and gently pressed me into step with him, slowly and softly moving me away from the men till I should have mastered the first quickness of my despair.

Under my feet I felt the grass, and that we walked in a level space of no great extent, for ever as he went he turned me right and right about, so that we went like sentries, but pacing slowly, he in silence and I in outer dumbness also, though inwardly my heart was almost singing out of a gladness that was springing anew in me without any reason that I could give, and also without my asking myself why, but so it was.

And presently, as if he knew my recovered mood, he stayed my steps, and out through the mist in my eyes I perceived that he lifted his face a little forward against the breeze, as if he held it thus that the wandering wind might caress it.

"Ah!" he said, then, in that wonderful tone of sympathy that went to my heart so, "do you feel this soft wind in your face? When I was a little lad, wandering in the mountains and waste places at home, yonder in Wales, I used to have a secret of my own—that this quiet breeze was the soul of Christ from Calvary, wandering in sad sorrow, aching in hope if men would still not turn to the love of holiness. And I remember once, I was so full of trouble for Him, that I lay out on the mountain all night that I might wait till dark should drop and midnight be quiet over all the world, and then, when all other sound was still, He would be able to hear me as I cried out that I knew His grief,

and knew why His soul wandered through the mountains. And when I had done that, and dawn was come, I went home content, full with a great quiet, and ever since then this one wind of all the winds of God is the wind that I have loved."

Just with those simple words he spoke—just with those simple words did he comfort me, speaking and knowing that he comforted me, and yet choosing no test or argument for his purpose, nay, having no purpose, but just letting his own mind, tuned to my grieving, wander back through his most golden memories, until his instinct came to that one remembrance, straightway loosening his tongue to give it a voice and me a help.

And if it be said that they were strange words to hear from such a man, one who was the theme of many columns for fearless skill and relentless valour, I can only say that to me it seemed the one thing he could have said, and that, looking back now out of my fuller knowledge of him, it seems all of a piece with the rest, with his face and figure, his glance and carriage—nay, with the whole man and his doings, as I shall try to show them in these pages, not alone out of my own remembrances, but out of the remembrances of men, ay, and women, too, who knew him in the moments when the natural man is shown in every word and action—shown and proved to the core.

And yet, when I have said all that I may say of him, still at the core of all my memories lie the tone and the manner and the moment of his saying the words I have just recounted, for by them he brought me back into fellowship with the goodly souls who know how weak is strength, who know that strength is but eternal watchfulness and readiness to struggle, and who therefore understand that it is the striving after what is noble and right which makes goodness, rather than the never slipping because temptation never rushed resistless or sapped insidious in the blood.

. . . "Aching with hope that men would still turn to love holiness"—I have not yet heard the longing of Christ for men put into truer words.

CHAPTER V

OF THE MAN WHO DIED BETWEEN OUR KNEES, AND OF THE LESSON OF THAT

IT was after the comfort had been with me for some few minutes that the reaction came upon me for a breath or two, causing the Captain to tell me that the men would now listen to me the readier for my having transgressed and mourned for it, and bringing him to utter that haunting saying which has been like a star to me since, namely, that he had never found men fail to answer if he took them on the nobler side.

And I remember that by the time he had finished his words I felt no more trouble, but turned gladly to go and see the wounded men and find whether there were anything I still might do for them.

When I looked, however, I found a doctor busy with them; for it seemed he had come with the troop the Captain had brought, though I had not noted him then, neither the Lieutenant who was now standing further along the ridge, and who was afterwards to be my good friend.

The doctor had seemed to find the wounded men already so well bandaged that he altered little of what he found done, and by the time I was come near he was turning away from them to go elsewhere. His eye, however, caught the cross on my collar, and straightway he broke into the brogue which I learned to love so well, but which I do not attempt to reproduce for fear of hurting many good Irishmen by my failure.

“ Ah, now, padre, but you’re late this time ! Not one of these

boys is going to be time-expired this time, bar poor Brown at the end yonder, and he's off the strength already. But where's the Captain off to now?"

"To see to the other two troops," I answered. And then, before I could stop—"But what a strange man he is!"

"Strange, did you say? Ah, now, and that's the truth; truer than ye meant it, even!" returned the doctor emphatically. "Don't I know it! I was no way pleased when we got the word, last night, to turn out and ride to save that sorrow of a column yonder, for it's little sleep I'd had the night before. So, for fear I'd fall out of my saddle with sleep and break my neck, I rode with him and his squadron, that never loses track of any man of it, sick or wounded, dead or asleep, riding or walking, waking or sleeping, as you'd know for yourself if you were with him once on a night ride, and watched him handling the squadron along in the dark, as if every man in it was his friend that he was looking after. And in between the winks—as I slept and waked and wished I was sleeping again, but in my blankets—I thought of him, and double-thought of him, and then I couldn't make it out at all why he should do what he does do. And it's the same thing that I thought again at the break of day, when we heard the firing ahead, and he shouted to his Kaffir, 'Dirk! my carbine!' and fixed his bayonet on it, and threw his hat to the Kaffir to carry, and in six words gave each troop leader his job, and then took this troop himself, and said, 'Come, gentlemen,' as if he was asking them to leave the smoking-room now and come in to dinner. And the next minute away he was with them, for all the world like the Galway Blazers. 'Ah!' says I to myself, 'there you go, hell-for-leather, and all the while the smartest and the handsomest woman my two eyes did ever see on this green earth is quarrelling with herself and everyone else, and building up a temper like the devil's own, all because you will be here, when she's gnawing herself to the bone to have you yonder. And I don't know why you do it,' says I. 'Why the divil do you do it, anyhow? Why now?' That's the question I'm forever asking myself for him—Why does he do it? It's not for promotion,

for I've known him to refuse that when he was a scout. Why does he do it, then? Tell me why, padre."

"I cannot," I answered, not having had time to consider. "Men do strange things about women. It may be that it is some unhappiness about the lady you mention." But while I said that I could not believe that he fought so splendidly from any such unworthy motive as disappointed love.

"Ah, now, padre, didn't I say already that the woman would put all the rest of the men in the world to be the door-mat for him to wipe his feet on if he'd only come in to see her?"

"But," I replied, "perhaps that is not the woman. It may be that there is some other woman he is thinking of."

"And it might be that you're right there," returned the doctor with a quick little smile. "But if I tell you then that the two women are the same one woman, what then? Truth now, I'd not take oath that I'm right there, for I can't be sure; you never can be sure what's behind the mind of him, barring it's sure to be something you never thought of—and right. However, I've no time for the tale now. Ask me some other time when I'm not working, and I'll tell you a tale as strange as any you'd read in a book. I'd like you to hear it, too, for perhaps you're better at guessing what lies under men's doings than I am; a padre should be. And now I'm away to work."

So the doctor strode away, while I turned to look after the figure of the Captain. And while I looked I saw a rider coming from where the other troops must lie, straight to the Captain, who spoke with him a minute or two, and then each reined about and returned, the other rider whence he had come, and the Captain to us.

It seemed he was but come to get the doctor's report about the wounded, however, and then he was for riding away again, to find the Colonel, across yonder where the guns had been thundering when they drove the commandoes upon us. But just as he was lifting rein to go he saw me near, and whether it were something in my face I know not, but he said quietly, "I am off to see the Colonel; perhaps you would like to ride over with me?"

"Thank you ; I will get my horse and come," I said, not because I desired to see Colonel Rostron, but because I desired to be with this Captain.

When I came to mount, however, I had new proof of the kindness of these men, for none other than the grey old sergeant-major held my horse for me to mount, whereat I remembered that he had been kneeling on one knee beside the wounded man, over whom the Captain was bending, when the two men told the story of my despair, and in this action of his now in holding my horse I read the softness of his sympathy also.

Like his Captain, too, he chose the right way of speech to hearten me, for he said kindly : " He is a nailing good little horse. There's a touch of Basuto in him, and the way he carried you through that piece of bad ground as we came was fine. He crossed it like sunshine, and never so much as stumbled once. He's only a bit too fat, but he'll soon work that off now with us."

I was quite taken aback by this mention of bad ground, for in my excitement I had noticed no such detail, and all to cover the vacancy in my mind I answered with a little jest : " Ah, I have been told once or twice that he is a very good horse, and many times that he is quite too good for a parson."

The sergeant-major smiled merrily at that, and cheerily pulled the horse's ears in fun. " For some parsons, perhaps," he said ; " but we know, don't we, chummie ?"

Thereat I reined away, with a smile, too, and a grave, " Till I see you again, friends."

For the first quarter of a mile, as we dipped down off the ridge and rode along the level, my companion spoke no word. Then, however, he turned in his saddle and looked back at the ridge we had held.

" That's rideable," he broke out insistingly. " That's ground good enough if the Boers had been good enough. It's not as smooth as a lawn or as level as a table, but they could have gone at it heads down and knees in, charging. They'd have lost men, many men ; but it's fit ground, and rideable. It's strange their

leaders don't teach them to rush us when they get such chances. It would cost them men, but if they did it only a dozen times it would pay them well, for it would make us move less free, and so we'd lose chances that we take at the gallop now. The Boers are wrong; they're missing their chances still, as they've missed them from the first. They'll learn this chance yet, but it will be too late then."

I glanced back also. To me the slope of the ridge looked a place for horses to break their necks and mangle their riders over if they went fast. But this master-craftsman, pondering a problem of his craft, called it good enough for charging over, whereat I remembered that the sergeant-major had said that I had ridden with the troop over what he called "bad ground," and yet I had not noticed it. I thought of the miserable spirit bred by its leader in the column I belonged to, and so, comparing it with this other spirit, my voice came out with a question before I was aware.

"Sir," I requested, "will you tell me how many Boers there must be before you would think it right to run away with your squadron?"

"One!" came the answer, quick and whole as a shot. "One! If the country was just right, flat and clear as a table, and he was well-mounted and a good shot, with his bandoliers full and his mind set. I'd have to run, or let him kill as many of my men as he thought fit. He could be got, but he'd be too costly. The only thing would be to retire till one came to dead ground, and there drop a few good shots and pass on, and let them wait till he came within point-blank range. But that's the continual problem in war; the problem of whether a thing is too costly or not. And that's the difference between generals, too. Some spend five hundred men where they should not have spent five, and then again they spend five hundred and draw back where they should spend fifty thousand rather than not make their point. That's what I tell my lieutenants. They know that if they lose one man carelessly I'll never forgive them, but if they spend the last man on a thing that should be done, then I'll have no word for it but pride—and sorrow."

"Ah!" I answered, and said no more, for I felt all like a child that has wandered beyond the garden gate into the great world. I was dumb before his certainty. And as we cantered on in silence, suddenly we came upon where three men were lying in company with two horses, all dead as it seemed to me.

But the Captain drew rein beside them: "One not dead," he said, as if he reported to himself upon the five bodies. With that report, too, he swung down out of the saddle, and stooped over the form of the nearest of the men, a figure dressed in blue clothing like any townsman, and wearing the soft hat of everyday wear.

When I, too, had dismounted and come close to the man I saw that he was splendidly big, with dark beard and straight brows, and that his brown eyes looked at us with neither dread nor appeal in them. And as I looked at him lying there, habited only as for peace and quiet daily labour, yet lying so stricken, his blood dyeing that everyday garb, and only the bandoliers across his chest and the rifle beside him to tell that he was a soldier fighting for his country, a dreadful doubt struck me for the first time.

These men wore no uniform, and the thing seemed to cry out upon me, all accusation, that they were peaceful men snatching up weapons to defend themselves from wanton attack. If a nation puts its men in uniform, and drills them to text-book exercises, it may well look to be attacked by war, since, by wearing war's trappings, and dabbling in war's formulas, it has recognised war and thus given war a right of operation against it. But this nation, against which we brought such vast armies, had worn no uniform, practised no drill, privileged no military caste, hearkened none after the maxims of this modern Cæsar or that—surely all that was proof that it had never contemplated war as being possible, and proof, too, that we must be in the wrong.

A nation which made none of the recognised preparations for war would surely have agreed to anything in reason rather than let things come to war. Surely our demands must have gone

beyond the extreme when unprepared men would face even war with the greatest empire in the world rather than yield. We must have asked that which men could not give and yet live on, facing their living thoughts. Like the voice of the prophet of old, suspicion cried these thoughts upon me as I looked at this man.

Moreover, as I looked at him lying thus spent, there upon the ground where he had dropped from the saddle, and at the Captain bending over him, I seemed to see myself as one too guilty for easy words. For, a minute ago, I had been setting up this Captain as the finest character I had ever met ; but now, if this were the kind of man he was using his iron courage and deadly skill upon—well !

All in a breath it seemed monstrous in me to have admired him—monstrous in him, with his effectiveness, to pit himself against these poor citizens, and worst of all to criticise their failure to charge the ridge. Yet all in that same breath, too, the Captain had turned to his saddle, unslung his water-bottle, and unscrewed the stopper.

“ Here ! ” he said, as he knelt and held the water to the lips of the wounded man.

The Boer took the water in little slow sips, as if he had not strength to take enough at one deep draught, though his face showed how grievously he had thirsted, and as he finished the Captain looked at me and said warmly : “ When I am wounded I do long so for water. One’s very bones seem to ache for it then.”

I had no answer, nor did he need one, but spoke now to the man :

“ Where are you hit, chum ? ” he asked, gently as if this were his brother.

The man was lying on his right side and elbow, his right hand propping his head and his left leg drawn up with the knee in the air. He did not speak an answer to the question, but with a slow left hand touched his right groin, where the blue cloth was dyed a wet, dark purple with blood.

The Captain nodded and, stooping farther over, glanced at the

man's back with what seemed to me a dreadful understandingness. Then he spoke again, quite quietly :

"Went up and across. Richochet," and he nodded.

I, too, looked, and saw that the wet stain from the right groin was answered by another on the left side of the small of the back.

I had never met with such a wound before, which caused me to wonder a little and to say nothing. But I watched and saw that the Captain looked this man steadfastly in the eye for a minute before he said, speaking with graver gentleness : "Is there anything you would like me to do for you when we get back to the railway?"

The man seemed to bestir himself to speak, as if he hastened to get the words said, that he might resume the business of keeping from groaning with the pain. "No ; my cousin was riding with me. I sent the message to my wife and children by him. Thank you."

The words gave me a shock of grim intelligence. It seemed this man's wound was mortal, and both these men had known it from the first. This, then, was the reason I had never seen such a wound before—that men with such wounds did not live to reach hospital. All the meaning of the word "mortal" rushed upon me as I stared from one to the other, neither of them noticing me, or looking anywhere but at each other. This man was still alive, still thinking, speaking, feeling, and yet nothing that man could do could loosen the clutch of Death from him. One man's hand had slain him, but not all the hands of all the men in the world—kings, lords, or commoners—could undo it and give him back to his wife and children.

"It is terrible !" I broke out.

My troubled eyes were on the man's untroubled ones, and calmly he looked back at me and spoke.

"You must expect this when you go to war," he said patiently, and all as if this were a matter which to-morrow would set right of itself.

The Captain nodded his appreciation of that, and held the water-bottle to the dry lips once more. This time, however, the man tried to drink as deep as his pain longed for, but in the

midst of it his throat suddenly refused to pass the water, his lips shut with a gasp, his eyes rolled upward and backward till only the whites were to be seen, and then his body quietly collapsed, his bent leg straightening itself with a jerk. For a long moment I waited in shocked suspense, and then I was aware of the Captain laying his hand on the other man's brow, while his voice came forth, deep and emphatic, "This was a man!"

"Is he dead, then?" I asked, awed no less by this man's living quiet than by the dead quiet of the other.

"Dead," said the Captain, standing to his feet with the word. Then, gravely as if he performed some religious rite, he drew himself up and saluted the dead—saluted that body at his foot which a moment ago had answered to me that you must expect this thing if you go to war.

"And now," continued the Captain evenly, "we'll get on and find the Colonel."

Obedient as a machine I turned and mounted. Nay, I see now that I was fast becoming as an automaton in the company of these iron men, who gave death or took it, all as if death were the daily business of life, the commonest thing in life, an office-work for drudging clerks to pile up as they might pile up figures in a ledger, or a thing, as it were, that if one missed this train that was no matter, since one might catch the next three minutes later.

And as we rode I no more held myself guilty for having admired this Captain as against this man just dead. Whatever the two Governments had done—our Government or theirs—this Captain and that man were men, about the business of men, not like the secret plotters and crafty schemers of politics. Over all other things this Captain was a soldier to the bone; over all other things that dead man lying yonder had been a soldier to the bone. That his country's Government had, or had not, trained him or uniformed him for war was an accident of small weight compared with the spirit in him that answered me so calmly—"When you come to war you must expect these things."

It was the thing in him that was instinct in those words which

counted as between man and man, the same thing which had spoken and been spoken in the Captain's words when, with his unerring instinct, he had summed up the one thing that matters in that emphatic dictum—"This was a man"—a man's epitaph upon a man, truly.

So we rode on.

CHAPTER VI

OF THE HIGH AND SPLENDID REASON A TRUE SOLDIER MAY
HAVE IN COMING TO WAR

"FIFTY odd wounded—ours and theirs," said the Captain. Pondering as we rode. "That will need a good many Cape carts. A cart will only hold two badly-wounded men, with the driver squatting in front; or it will hold three sitting, and a driver, if they are not too badly hit. If the Colonel has had many casualties, I'm afraid I'll have to camp out here with mine till they can send ambulances. It's a bit rough. They could stand a waggon, now, better than an ambulance to-morrow, when their wounds have stiffened."

It seemed that his mind was for ever busy with the problems of his work, and I had begun wondering if he ever had time to think of other things when we topped a little rise, and yonder, a little way in front of us, came three riders, and after them a troop, whereat the Captain spoke again, prompt as a bell, "The Colonel, the Brigade-Major, and Lee's troop of B Squadron—for that's Lee's grey racer." Observation, and the instant summing up of everything seen, seemed not so much a habit with him as rather to lie at the root of his nature.

At seeing us the Colonel caused the troop to walk, while he himself and the Brigade-Major continued at the canter, so that we four met out of earshot of any but ourselves.

"Colonel," began the Captain quickly, "I got your order, but I have so many wounded, fifty odd of ours and theirs, that I couldn't obey and bring the squadron over till I'd seen you about carts or ambulances. And there's the dead to bury."

"You did quite right," returned the Colonel heartily. "Your report didn't find me till I'd sent the order, so I'm bringing the rest over to you, and there's quite a convoy of Cape carts and spring-vans and what not, that we captured as we swung round the rear of the Boers. They'll carry all your wounded. And I want to look at the ground so as to know all you did, and to know, too, why this other column went away and let the Boers go."

With that the Captain seemed to flare into furious rage.

"If you want to know why that column went away, Colonel," he half gnashed, "if you want to know that, you'll have to look into the carrion carcasses of its leaders. God! if ever men had a chance, or if ever men threw one away, it was this morning on that ridge. Yonder lie my dead, dead for ever, and dead for nothing; dead, and nothing had in return for them. Dead in doing something that failed, because the curs we came to help could still think of nothing but crawling home to their kennels. Colonel, if you captured waggons enough, then let me take my dead in to the railway. Let me drive the waggon myself, and I'll get on the same road as that column, and as soon as it makes camp I'll drive the waggon-load over that coward's tent-pegs, so that he'll rush out, shouting to know who that is in his tent ropes. And then I'll tell him! Then he shall hear who they are! *Dun*, he shall know who they are in his tent-ropes!"

The Colonel—a tall, complete-looking man—turned and glanced at the Brigade-Major, who made no more to do but halted his horse and let the Colonel and the Captain ride on, whereat I, too, fell back and waited also, till we could no longer distinguish the words of the Captain's vehement outpourings. Then we two looked at each other and followed on, keeping a discreet distance.

"That's him!" said my companion with a little smile, "that's him to a hair. If he could throttle that temper of his, he'd be a general before the war's out."

Not with any shade of malice did the Brigade-Major speak, but rather as one who meant a loving excuse of one he held high in his heart. Yet before my mind could stop my tongue it had

broken forth vehement to defend the Captain, so vehement that I could scarce choose quiet words wherewith to answer.

“I think he is justified of his anger when he has lost his men for nothing, as he thinks. They are such good men, they fight so well.”

The Brigade-Major looked at me, his face approving me, and his manner that of a man who speaks of a thing marvellous.

“Ah, then you’ve seen them in action—this action, I suppose! And if you have you’ll have something to remember, something good to remember. But you may be thankful you weren’t close enough to *hear* them in action. All the languages under the sun, and all the swear words in every language, you’ll hear them all like shrapnel bullets about you if you’re with them in a tight corner. And then let any one of them do a foolish thing, and he’ll silence all their swear words with the language he’ll roar at that beggar: he’ll make the beggar’s hair stand up and curl. But, all the same, let any one else interfere; let any one of us dare to suggest that any man or any horse of his is less than gold, fine gold, and he’ll stiffen on us like a mastiff. They’re the riff-raff of the wide world—his men—and of half its breeds, Greeks, and Poles, Turks, and what-not, even Jews; men that no one else will have, or could handle or do anything with if they had them, and yet he thinks them marvels—and, gad! so do we, but not his way—not his way.”

“But,” said I eagerly, “they do seem very obedient to him, and more as if they did it to please him than for fear of the regulations.”

“Quite so, quite that. That’s just it. That’s the marvel,” assented the Brigade-Major. “As a matter of fact, while he thinks them some sort of angels, I wouldn’t swear they don’t say their prayers to his horse’s tail. But as to regulations, nobody meddles with his squadron. His men don’t come to the regimental orderly room; they’re left to him to deal with, and no questions asked. We hear all about it, though; we can’t help hearing, because of the way the tales of his discipline go buzzing through the column. Army regulations are not in it. In his squadron the only regulations are the ones he lays down himself.

One man was caught stealing from his comrades. He was thrown down instanter, and pegged out on the ground till we marched next day. Then his belts and arms and horse were taken away, and he was made to march with the waggons, afoot, on half rations, till we came to a base where he could be kicked out of the regiment and sent out of the country as an undesirable. Another man shirked his turn of picket; he was tied up to a waggon wheel, standing, the whole night, and then kicked out like the other. Again, if a man growls at receiving an order, or makes himself generally hairy and disagreeable, he sends him away out of the ranks to go and ride with the waggons, and draw extra rations, and have an extra blanket——”

I could not forbear exclaiming my astonishment at this last punishment.

“I have not heard before of anything so strange as that for punishment,” I said.

The Brigade-Major smiled cheerfully at me.

“No,” he said, “and I only know of one thing stranger, and that’s the effectiveness of it. He’s given that punishment three times now, and each time the man has come to him after the first day, and some sergeant with him, to be his bond that he’ll never do it again if only the Captain will give him some other punishment. And as in each case the man was literally in tears, and the sergeant very earnest—well, the beggar’s been forgiven, for this Captain can’t stand seeing anything in pain.”

“Ah!” I said, and then my lips forgot to go on; for I was pondering and pondering what I had just heard; the thing I leave the reader to ponder also. And only when at last another point struck me did I stir me to a question. “For cowardice—what is the punishment he gives for cowardice?” I asked.

The Brigade-Major chuckled, as one remembering a good story.

“He thinks he has no cowards in the squadron, though I’ll swear that lots of his fellows only go through the places he leads them into by just keeping their minds fast to him and shutting out everything else. But in the beginning there was one time, when he’d got right up into the thickest spot there was, with

about a dozen or so of men as usual, and he suddenly turned round and saw one fellow who'd dropped snugly behind a stone, about five yards short of the crest where the rest were. He stood straight up, opened the breech-block of his carbine, took out the cartridge, and looked it over to see that it was a good one. Then he put it back into the chamber and closed the breech, facing the fellow, and the fellow looking at him out of a white face the whole time ; and you are to remember that all this time the bullets were cracking past so thick that even himself said they were brisk.

" Well, and he fixed the poor sweep with his eye, and—' Look here, old man,' he said, ' you're going round the school on the wrong leg, quite, lying there behind that stone. These fellows up here in front are getting it pretty thick, no doubt ; still, they won't all be killed ; some of them will survive. But you won't ; you're the only one that's certain not to survive if you stop there. You'll be dead—extremely dead ; for if you're not up here in the front within ten seconds I'll shoot you so dead your carcase won't remember that it ever was alive. Now !' and with that he aimed right at the poor beggar's eye.

" His men have often seen him take a stalk of this dead wire-grass and set it up in the dust, and then cut it in two at fifteen yards with the carbine, about the hardest test a marksman could have with our bullet and our carbine ; and they say it took that fellow just something under one second to leave that stone and get up into the front. But he wasn't done yet ; his dreadful Captain followed him up with more explanations.

" ' You see, Chartley,' he said, ' you've been making a mistake. You're not here to save your life ; you're here to save your soul. I suppose you never thought of it that way, did you ?'

" ' No,' says the man, just as he'd have said yes to that terrible Captain's yes, and no to his no, no matter what it meant ; for the shiver was on him thick at the death he'd just escaped.

" ' Ah,' says his Captain, ' but now you know, and so you won't make that mistake any more. And I suppose you won't be happy again till you've done something to make you feel you're a man once more. All right ; I want somebody to go up to

Corporal Davies, on that little rise there, and tell him to send a man down to report to me, so you can go.'

"They say he had to shout the words, so as to be heard at all above the din of the bullets, they were so thick, and this poor fellow got up, and first he looked across the open part he had to cross, and next he looked at every man there as if he said farewell to this world, and then he started.

"Well, he got about seven strides on the way, and there all the rifles in all the wide world seemed all at once all turned on poor him, and the bullets seemed to come at him as if all the calico ever sold was being ripped off at once. His heart dropped straight into his boots, and he dropped flat on the stones, and his eyes, as wide as a baby's eyes, turned round on the terrible Captain, that would surely kill him now.

"And, sure enough, the terrible Captain did half lift his carbine to shoot him, and half open his mouth to swear a threat at him; but then he lowered the carbine again, and 'Poor sweep!' he said, and out he stepped into the bullets and put his hand on the poor beggar's shoulder and helped him up.

"'Come, chum,' he said, 'I'll go with you, and you'll see that bullets don't hurt unless they happen to hit you, and then it doesn't matter—you've got it, anyhow, and there's no use troubling about it any more. It's all right; come on.' And he tucked his arm into the man's, and walked him along quite quietly. 'You see,' says he again, 'it's no use skipping and scurrying. You're just as likely to skip into the way of one as out of the way of another. And if you're no further use to the Lord God, good or bad, then He'll corpse you, and you can't get out of it; hide or run or do as you will, you're done for. And so, if you've got to get it this time, well, take it like a little man; it won't hurt you half so much that way, and it'll be easier on your friends.'

"And now," concluded the Brigade-Major, "from all I hear, that's the most reckless man he's got in the squadron."

Once again, however, I had no ready word wherewith to answer, save an easy phrase that it was most marvellous, and thus we rode some distance in silence till, like to a man whose

mind has been caught upon some striking thought in a story, the Brigade-Major broke out again, but chucklingly :

“ You’re not here to save your damned carcass ; you’re here to save your soul. Did you ever think of it like that ? ”

The Brigade-Major seemed to see in the thought only another typical eccentricity of the Captain. I saw in it only another typical expression of the man. The Brigade-Major might chuckle over it. I could not take it so easily, or let my lips speak smoothly and emptily about it. By those words the Captain had seemed to lay it down that the cause of a war, or the effect of it, were not the chief point to the soldier. To the soldier the one overshadowing point was that the war gave him a means of salvation to his soul by the offer of his body as a sacrifice to his country, or so I read it. And, looking at it in that light, and considering, I was brought to a pause.

“ Not to save your lives, but to save your souls, do you come to the breath of battle.” Surely he who could so conceive a soldier’s creed and calling was come very close to a true vision of this life, of death, and of what shall be hereafter, when the darkness shall pass, and the Holy of Holies shall be for our feet to walk in.

And this was the Captain of whom you are to hear.

CHAPTER VII

OF HOW I READ THE SERVICE OVER THE DEAD ON ICHABOD'S KOP

WHEN we came to the ridge many little fires of scanty fuel were boiling strange cooking-pots, from empty jam tins to kitchen kettles, where the men were making coffee or tea after the fight, and against the long ride back to camp. Before we dismounted, however, the Colonel reined round on the ridge to look back the way he had come, which was the way the Boers had come, whereby I saw that the Captain had left his rage on the way, and had fallen to describing how the affair had gone on our side. My companion halted close by, waiting in silence while the Colonel ran an eye over the whole ground from where the fight started to where it finished, hearkening the while to the Captain's brief words in pointing out the different places, and thus it was that I, being perforce halted within earshot, heard the quiet answer: "You are right; there is no excuse for that column. If he'd simply stayed there and held his ground—and it was good enough ground—then these two commandos were ours. Well, headquarters will ask him why he went away, and meanwhile we'll get things done and finished here, and then strike out for camp again. But call the men together first."

The men seemed gathering already, as if they were waiting to hear the Colonel's opinion of the fight. The outlying troops had come in and joined the rest, and I noted that three lieutenants, of a steady-eyed, self-reliant stamp, came together and stood near the Captain. And truly the Brigade-Major had spoken by the book when he said that there were men of many

breeds in this Captain's squadron, for many a blue eye and fair skin from Northern Europe and many a flashing eye and brown skin from all the lands of the South were here, all intent to hear what the Colonel said as he ran an eye over them all, seeming to glow with quiet content of them.

"Well, lads, I hear you've been doing it again, the same old way. I'm looking at the ground, and I can see what you did. It wasn't your fault we didn't pull it off; it never was D Squadron's fault yet, nor do I think it ever will be."

All the men's faces flashed into smiles at that, and they answered with a burst of the quick chorus I had heard before.

"Old D Squadron again! Old D! Old D first, and the rest nowhere!"

The Colonel threw up his face towards the Captain and half laughed till the chorus finished. Then he turned to the sergeant-major with a kindly look.

"Sergeant-major," he said quietly, "I've heard; it was well done. I'll remember it."

The sergeant-major flushed under the tan of his skin, and drew himself up and saluted without a word, while all the men laughed cheerily and broke into a running fire of "Good old Tom! good the old Induna!" whereat he turned and looked at the Captain, and the Captain looked back with an earnest smile and nodded once, as if this were a thing very near his heart.

The three lieutenants were smiling, too, but they stiffened like detected thieves when the Colonel turned to them.

"You three—well, I don't know what to do about you three. I think the best thing would be to come to breakfast with you, if you've got any."

So the speeches ended in merry smiles, and we all dismounted and walked to some flat stones and sat down, for the Captain would in no wise let me hang back. Nay, we were no sooner sat down than he spoke to the Colonel, saying:

"Sir, you have heard me tell that by the old Welsh laws, if a man of a tribe were in a tight place, where his enemies were like to have him cheap and slay him, and then some stranger came along and helped him so that he came out alive, that stranger

then received the privilege of kin, with a man's share in all the clan's goods and the clan's help in his feuds, its oaths in his suits before the judges, he to rank as one of the clan, in fact. Well, and here's the chaplain I told you of, and now he's upon privilege of kin with D Squadron, our boast his boast, our secrets his secret, and his secret ours."

All this was said smilingly, but as the Captain spoke the last three words he turned his face upon me, and I saw a significance in his look matching that which came into his voice, all as if he told me that I must keep secret the story of my sin of an hour ago.

And before I could debate within myself whether I could righteously so do, the Colonel was speaking merry things to me, as whether he should add my name to the list of casualties as being dead—having become one of D Squadron, the "Legion of the Lost," as the regimental wits had dubbed it—or whether he should but report me as missing.

And while we were still smiling, the Kaffir servants of the Captain and the lieutenants came and poured coffee for each of us, and set out bread and meat, ribs of mutton which had been three or four days drying, and now were broiled, well salted the while, over the embers. Those who have eaten that meat know what goodly eating it furnishes.

The doctor sat with us, sharing the meal, and when it was done the Colonel and the rest of them went with him to see the wounded ; but I, when I rose to go with them, happened to turn my head to look back once more over the way we had gone to meet the Colonel, and, behold ! yonder came horsemen again, but this time they were ordered squadrons instead of a loose cloud.

Eight they were in number, and with them many white-hooded Cape carts and spring vans, which, as they came, went to and fro in a way I did not understand for awhile. But presently one van halted by the spot where lay the slain Boer of whom the Captain had said with all his heart, "This was a man," and straightway then I understood that they were gathering the Boer dead and wounded as they came.

Thereat thought came upon me with a rush, for I saw well that they would presently ask me to read the service for the burial of the dead over these slain men, and I—dare I do that now after the way I had sinned? Those men were dead—dead nobly, and, being dead, had no way of protesting against the profanation of their burial by a service read by one such as I was now. Their dead bodies seemed to cry out upon me so that I should have mounted and ridden off after my own column if I could have compassed that cowardice. But the echo of the Captain's emphatic phrase was too insistent, "This was a man," and I coveted that he should use no other phrase of me, whatever might happen.

The waggon was here and the dead unloaded before I found the Captain, but then I wasted no time.

"Sir," I said, "those men lying dead yonder—these men who have made the last supreme sacrifice that man can make—I cannot read the service over them. Why should they, men who have died nobly, have their burial profaned by one who has transgressed God's law? Would they not cry out, if they could speak, that I should spare them that?"

Softly the Captain smiled—long and softly, and with a light in his eye as if he almost laughed. Then :

"Come," he said—"come now and ask them. Dead as they are, they will answer that."

Never a word said I, but went with him, and never a word more said he till we came to the trench and the two rows of dead beside it—two-and-thirty men, Briton and Boer alike (though the Boers were the more for number), here done and finished with this earth, save for enough of it to cover them. And the first man we came to, lying at the near end of one row, was the Boer who had died so man-like out yonder.

"Look at his face," said the Captain in strong tones. "He died in burning pain, his last thoughts of the wife he was leaving widowed, of his children orphaned, and, above all, of his country conquered and lost. Can you think of any death more bitter than his, of any agony much greater? And yet—look steadfastly at his face—does it carry any sign of all that he suffered?"

It did not. I looked, and I could not say a word, for the face was as calm in its bearded massiveness as if it were graven stone. I turned my eyes from that face to the Captain's face, and he nodded slowly to me. "He is troubling none," he went on. "He frets none. But look at the next man now. He is one of mine," and with the words he knelt at the man's feet, as if to consider him closely.

I, too, knelt and looked. The man was a typical specimen of the best middle-class at home, tall, well-built, and clean-shaven but for the yellow moustache. Even as he lay there, dressed in the worn khaki of a trooper, he looked full manlike. "He was an Oxford man," said the Captain; "son of the rector of one of the richest livings in England. This is the end of him, under a feigned name. Look at him. Is he troubling?"

He was not. He had been hit in two places, in the cheek and forehead, and the blood covered one side of his fair face, coating it a rich purple that shone in the sunlight; even the half of his golden moustache was empurpled. Yet, even so, the look on his face was all one with that on the faces of his dead fellows right and left of him, a majesty of quiet that I had never noticed in the faces of the dead before.

The Captain was speaking on, low and vehement, a little triumphant smile running in his face the while. "Are they troubling about any details of life, or any scruples of our conduct who kneel here? How infinitely petty to them are all these huge dreads of ours which threaten to overwhelm us! There they lie, and if we bury them it is well—for us. And if we do not bury them it may be ill—but still only for us. The well or the ill is all with us, not with them. They care neither way; naught of what we do can stir them out of their infinite quiet. If to bury or to burn their bodies, or to leave them forlorn on the feldt, will ease the cark in our living minds, they will not say us nay. Though we were one for whom yesterday they would have gladly died, and now we writhed here with some grief that yesterday they would have moved heaven and earth to comfort, yet now they will but keep their silence, as if they said, 'It will end. All that will end, and you will come to the quiet, too,

in due time.' That is all. Nothing matters to them any more in the face of their tremendous endedness."

"Endedness!" My mind echoed the word. I knew well what he meant, and yet neither could I find a better word for it. Nor did I search far, for of a sudden there came that into the Captain's face which parched my mouth and shut my throat convulsively upon my breath; something which made my blood run in fluttering broken tides through my veins, and sent a thrill searing and burning through my very bones. For his eyes had flashed into a fixed stare, through me and past me, far yonder, far out across the feldt, as if his soul strained and craned out through his eyes to pierce into that which bodily eyes shall never see on this side death. Through his sun-tanned skin a red flush went wave by wave, seeming to thicken and darken with each fresh pulse, and the veins of his neck and temples discovered themselves swelled and purpled as if with passion, while his lips seemed separately alive and half blue with very passion as they parted and let forth his voice, that had a strange lift and a lilt in it. And in that volcanic passion of exaltation in pose and face and voice did his words come:

"Yea, if we could catch them back now, if we could but shake these bodies till we forced the spirit to come and sit upon their lips again and answer the fury of our questionings, answer the fierceness of our longing to know; and if we could flash forth upon them some trouble of ours in burning, living, hissing words, make them hear the greatest and most maddening grief that man did ever know, they still would but hearken with still patience: they would not even smile at the incredible pettiness of it. 'It is all nothing,' they would say.

"Sunset of yestere'en saw them like us, living, breathing, feeling, moving, fretting. All things that are humanly possible possible then to them, and now they are no more than this earth that shall cover them until, by the working of the laws of God upon the matter of God's creating, this earth and its sun—which for time immeasurable, through space unplumbable, at a speed ungraspable, have whirled round and round some mightier force not yet discovered—shall come to their doom, a doom which

shall not only shatter and refashion them to some fresh end, but shall call up these dead to take their share of the future as they earned it.

"Think of that, try to realize that. Try to reason it out, and then tell me if you can still hesitate to read the Burial Service over these men. Will a God so vast stoop to a thing so small as the poor slip you made? I tell you no. The commands of God are the ideals He sets for us to aim at, not the rigid iron line, to slip from which but once is to fall into the black abysm of the for ever lost."

His lips were parted still to speak on, the gnawing questioning of the Thing Hidden was still in his attitude, the furious will to track the steps of God to the very door of His tent was still in his face. The last word spoken was spoken still on the same high ringing level of a passionate desire to be done with doubt, of burning longing to be certain of the Ultimate. And I, as I stood there before him, browbeaten by his headlong fire, spoke whether I would or no, saying words that I had not chosen or pondered then, though I have often pondered them since.

"Nay," I said, "in the face of a creation so awful, why read the service at all? Is it not a thing too piteously petty to fret about either way?"

The answer struck him to words again, instant and emphatic.

"Not so, not so! I have thought of that way, too, thought of it often and turned it this way and that, but it will not do. We are greater than that. Creation is great and awful, but we are greater and more awful still if we will. When God made all this immensity He made it solely as a theatre for man, for the soul of every man is a cell of immortal God Himself, set forth thus to practise itself in the only way open to a God who is omnipotent, and who, therefore, is shut out from war, and effort, and labour, and grief, and sorrow, and trouble, and courage, from all those things which make existence endurable. That is what man is—that is man—God in source and in destination. And if God have dwelt here in these bodies lying dead at our feet, now emptied of Him, then we must deal with these bodies as with

the image of God, as bodies that have served His purpose. But here comes the burial party, have your book ready."

Like as a child obeys, so I obeyed him. From the first word to the last I read the usual Burial Service, bating no word or line, but under it all my mind followed the reading but mechanically, for it was darkened and haunted by the terrible picture of the unfathomable problems and immensities of creation, hanging in the abyss that has neither bounds nor points, a picture from which my mind would fain have fled and escaped, but to which a dreadful fascination made it glance back fearfully at every step, lest it should be seized by it knew not what of knowledge.

And, looking back now on all the thoughts which shook me as I faced the issue thus opened before my feet, I say that it was not anything I had ever read or been taught in my preparation for the ministry, or in my practice of it, which saved my faith then, but only the tremendous egotism of the Captain's declaration that man is necessary to God, man being God's chosen vessel for the fight with evil.

Remember I did not debate this point out with the Captain, or ask him if I had read his meaning as he intended it. Verily I was afraid to do so, for while he, with his terrible fearlessness, would straightway adventure upon any uncertainty he met, resolute to know, and know, and know at all costs and risks, I am different. And if I be anchored safe in a strong haven I seek not to put out to where I see only storms threatening, and clouds whirling, and where I may be wrecked and lost for ever.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLING OF "THE FINEST WOMAN THE DOCTOR'S EYES DID EVER
SEE" AND OF THE CAPTAIN

BY midday I had rejoined my own column, as my duty bound me, and there I read the service over our own dead without hesitation, after which I rode on to overtake our wounded, who were being driven on to the railway without halt, that they might lie in hospital that night. It was late afternoon before I caught them, and dark before we reached the railway town, and by that time the carts and vans, with Old Fireproof's wounded men and Boers, had overtaken ours, in spite of the three hours' start our ambulances had had.

And yet it was not reckless driving, but skilful driving, which overhauled us, as the kindly Irish doctor assured me, for he had commanded them the whole way.

"Ah, man," said he, "I was to and fro from head to tail of the carts the whole way, hurrying them in, for I wanted the bad cases under cover to-night. And there's one thing these divils of irregular corps can do: they can furnish ye with the finest drivers in the world, an' I've got them with me this day."

A hundred wounded men and more are not transferred to a half-equipped and already crowded field hospital in five minutes, and both the doctor and I were worn weary by the time the work was done, and thus it came to pass that I could offer him the simple hospitality of supper and blankets in my tent, since by that time our column had come in, camped just at the edge of the town for safety, while Rostron's lay some two or three miles out for the sake of the grass for the horses.

True, the hospital doctors pressed my friend to use their mess, but as they would be busy for hours yet, attending to the new-come wounded, and as it is not in the nature of a kindly Irishman to sit down and eat alone, like a churl, it is no great marvel that he excused himself with a joke from accepting their proffer. When, however, I reflect that it was but a short canter back to his own camp and the good company there, it still seems something of a marvel to me that he should so cheerily accept my proffer, the more so in that I hold it not the part of a chaplain to carry whisky in his stores, as I softly explained to him.

How like an Irishman's courtesy was his answer: "Ah now, padre, I can get whisky in many places this night, if that's what I want, but you're too tired to come with me." So we went to my tent.

Even so, however, I can truly say that in my offer I had no thought of the story he had promised to tell me, nor do I think he intended it either, when, after supper was done, we began to talk. And yet we had not talked ten minutes before we came to the Captain again. It may be because my own mind steered that way, now that I was here in this lighted tent, safe within the lines of this garrisoned town, and still with all things mental so altered in aspect by my contact with him.

"When did you first meet the Captain?" I asked him, and thus it was, by way of the answer to that question, that I came to hear the first part of the story which has often held me for repeated hours, pondering and repondering some points of it.

For many a time since I came home have the ladies beguiled me into recounting my memories of this sad war, and almost every time some one of them has led me, by her close-plied questioning, to leave all else and speak of the irregulars. And, summing up those questionings, I think I can perceive wherein must lie the fascination which draws out those soft souls to hearken so eagerly after those men. It lies all packed up and rounded in the one word—Romance.

For though, when the ladies think of any disciplined regiment of the regular forces, they think of its officers as possible

subjects of romance to come, while its rank and file are to cause high flutter among the village maidens ; yet those romances of the officers and of the men are but the same old bell re-ringing, repeating and repeating once again an olden-told and iterated story, ending with wedding-bells and blushing bliss, in stately halls or rose-embowered cottages.

Whereas, when they ponder upon a confused regiment or irregulars, then, while perchance they think a little askance of its officers, as being somewhat suspect of being respectable, they pass on with eagerness to loose their fluttering dreams upon the wild rank-and-file, straightway adumbrating each man of it as hero of some moving, separate, strange romance—romance sad as the sound of the moaning winds that go, slow wailing, through forsaken lattices of ruined towers on ancient, haunted shores ; piteous, passed romance ; all wrought out and desolately done with long ago, save for the darkened ending that awaits the hero.

Thus, while they think of the regular regiment as being a thousand men and officers, with but one pattern of romance amongst them, they dream upon the other as being composed of five hundred separate entities ; wrecks and seared tokens of five hundred separate tragedies and sorrows, all gathered in the ranks to wear through the bitter days, till Death shall take the cup from their lips that knew the bottom of the bowl as well as the sparkling bubbles at the brim.

Well, and it may be there is something to be said for this idea, for too tragically often there lies a tragedy under the existence of the irregular, and can there be any high and moving romance without its breath of tragedy ? But yet, to leave all this unprofitable preliminary, I am driven to confess that, when the ladies have had their hearts' desire of me, and I have told them as much as good manners may of the one irregular's love-romance I hold the strangest, I cannot say that it seems to content all their eagerness quite. Truth to tell, it rather seems to leave them halting and irresolute, though it be the tale of that man all resolute—the Captain.

Upon this point, however, I diffidently set down what was put

to me by my old aunt. "John," she said, "don't be foolish. How should they be satisfied? They are all jealous. Remember, your captain-man was not a dummy in a book; he was get-at-able flesh and blood. They are all thinking how much better they would have done."

It should be observed, however, that my aunt is noted for her impatience of "romantic nonsense." Moreover, she thinks the Captain was the archetype of plain, practical common-sense. You, however, shall hear and judge for yourselves, beginning with what the doctor told me that evening in the tent.

"When did I first see him?" the doctor answered, repeating my question. "Ah, but that's a long time ago, if you count by happenings, and not by the almanac. Anyhow, it was after we'd taken Bloemfontein, and while some of us were ramping about the south-eastern Free State, to keep us busy while Bobs was getting ready for the general advance north to Pretoria, where, if you remember, we were going to end the war in one big battle, said we. He that's Captain now was the only one who wanted to know how we made that out; but then, he was only a bally irregular Johnnie, don't-cher-know, said we, and not an officer at that.

"We used to have our own opinions about the irregulars in those days, and there was a Colonel with us who wanted to bet him twenty pounds that the war would be finished when we got to Pretoria. All he answered was to tell the Colonel smilingly that he was no pickpocket, and to take the bet was only another way of picking his pocket of twenty pounds.

"You'll remember that time when our columns were running to and fro between the railway and the Basuto border, and when Sannah's Post first helped to show what we were in for. Well, our Captain that is now was just a sort of scout, and guide, and reconnaissancer, and intelligence man, and wet nurse generally to keep us from coming to another Sannah's Post, and he had a dozen or fifteen under him, men of his own picking from his own regiment, Rimington's Guides, and he and they would put their foot through every regulation in the book, not because they didn't know of them, but because they had to find some way of

showing that they were not infantry privates, or, by the piper, there were some of the Majors and Colonels with us would have drilled them into saluting and marching past beautifully in about three days.

"It wasn't three days and nights, though, especially nights, before the General commanding us found out what he'd got in this scout and his gang, from the work they did and the way they did it; and about that time the Majors and Colonels got the word not to meddle with the goodness of God to us, and so there was no more of them.

"And, after that, d'ye remember how our people strung out a long line of men from Bloemfontein clear to Thabanchu, and then tried to corner the Boers against it? And to us it looked as if we had got them cornered, for their waggons were slow, and our men hot after them. To-morrow morning, said we, we'll wake up and meet their white flag coming in to surrender.

"Even the General was a little bit disgusted when the scout wouldn't fall in with the tale.

"'How have you got them?' said the scout. "'They're not infantry: they're all horsemen. They've only to set their waggons on fire, choose a weak point in that thin line of men, and just ride over it.'

"Well, we rolled in to sleep, agreeing that these irregulars and Colonials were a deal of the mule, if not of the bounder; but when we waked up and found it wasn't a white flag coming to us, but just the news that the Boers had gone through the line of stops—well, we kept out of the scout's way for a bit.

"So that's the sort of man he was, and you needn't be told that we came to no Sannah's Post, or that, when the running about was ended, and the column was broken up and the units drifted into place for the general advance, there was more than one of us sorry to part with him.

"It may be I was sorriest of the lot, for he'd come rushing to South Africa rotten to the marrow with a fever he'd brought from some war in the swamps of God knows where, and I'd done what I could to keep it under while he worked for us, for some-

times he looked like a moving corpse, and yet the whole medical board couldn't have persuaded him to go to hospital. So I thought that, as there were still three or four days before the advance began, I'd take him with me into Bloemfontein, and get him into a house I knew there, and see what I could do, with sheets to put him between, and walls and a roof to keep the sun from him at noon and the chill at midnight.

"No doubt ye'll have heard often what condition the troops were in as to clothing when we took Bloemfontein. Some had sleeves to their tunics and seats to their breeches and some had none, and some had boots with soles and some without. I don't mean he was as bad as that, but he seemed to care very little for dress then, and he hadn't had a chance to draw new kit yet by reason of being away from his regiment. So there he was, as he rode in with me, in his worn uniform, and with the fever running in his eyes like sheet lightning, and his mouth shut tight to keep the pain down. He looked a war-bird if any man ever did, a deal more grim than handsome. Any doctor could see that the marrow of the man's bones must have been as yellow as the whites of his eyes with the fever.

"All the same, he would call in at the post-office as we rode into the town. He wanted to send a wire to somebody, or something of that sort, and so, as I had a letter in my pocket from some crazy lazybones at home, praying me by more oaths than Romeo's to get him a set of stamps—ye'll remember how the whole world went mad on Free State stamps just then—I thought I'd let him call, since he'd have called anyhow, whether I let him or not.

"Well, an' ye know the crowd there was in those days round that blessed post-office, horse and foot, and orderlies, and officers dismounting to go in and officers mounting to go away, and non-coms and troopers and privates, and Kaffirs holding horses, and an ox-waggon or two tangling itself up with the crowd, and only God's sunshine over it all keeping it all from quarrelling.

"Then inside there was a worse crowd, with a hundred men shoving like footballers where there was room for twenty, and one way or another the scout finished his business before I did, and

out he went to the horses again, for it was better that crowd outside than this inside. And perhaps ye'll not be astonished to hear that my Irish blood got out of conceit with the post-office, and the martial law, and the regulations, and all the rest of it, and I stepped out of the door, when I did finish, with some words in my mouth that my mother wouldn't have let me use if she'd heard them.

"Well, ye'll remember that the post-office there faces the square, and it's got a short little stoep or veranda, like any Boer house, with a couple of steps down to the level of the square. A fine platform for me just then, if I'd turned loose the things I was thinking about martial law and martial asses, as well as fools that collect stamps, and the bigger fools that buy them for them.

"But never a sprinkly word did I say, and not another breath did I take just then, for over the heads of all the crowd just to the right, at the edge of Maitland Street, there was a sight for sore eyes, if the eyes are an Irishman's eyes. Ye'll not have forgotten the push and rush of society women that came up, with a sunshade and an opera-glass, to watch us beat the Boers. Well, and here was one of them, the handsomest and the smartest of them; handsome enough and smart enough to have stayed in Mayfair and made excitement enough of her own, without rushing here to South Africa for it, like the common horde of them. 'Faith!' said I, 'what's she so far from home for? Is it excitement, or a man?'

"Whether it was a man or not, at any rate it wasn't the red-and-gold tabbed young staff officer she was standing with, for she was just in the nick of dropping him, quite in Hyde Park fashion, and while I took that in she started this way to the post-office.

"Now, that was no more natural than a wooden leg on a whale. In the first place, if a woman had any business in that jammed post-office she'd get a man to do it for her, or get him to come with herself. In the next place, of all the men in the world she'd choose she'd get a staff officer, for all the rest would have to wait while he was being attended to. But let me add the truth once more to my record, and confess that even if there

hadn't been all that about it, I'm still Irishman enough to have stood and watched her for her own sake, so fit and fine she was to look at coming through that crowd, that parted like water before a yacht in full canvas.

"And now perhaps you'll believe the shock I got when I found that, out of the corners of her eyes, the two sapphires that were the heart and the light of them were fixed on nothing in all this round wide world but him—the scout!

"His back was to her as she started this way, for he was standing by his horse's shoulder, looking for me to come out, and so his shoulder was to her as she passed. But all the way she saw the whole of him, from top to toe, and when she was a length this way past him, what did she do but halt in her pace and turn her face full round to his, half hesitating.

"That hesitation caught his eye. He's a born scout, and all the straightforward bustle about him was all right, but that one touch of indecision hit his mind, and he turned his two burning eyes full into hers.

"What there was in the look on his face I don't know, for both my eyes were busy on her instead of one watching each. But what its effect on her was I'll not forget in this world, for her face went red and white, with a grey coating over it as if it had been rubbed with bismuth. 'Oh, my oath!' said I to myself, 'my oath and my forswearing! It's a man, then, and that's the man!'

"Never a doubt had I of what I said, and neither would you have had one, padre, if ye'd seen her turn and take up her pace this way again, her lips pressed to keep them from trembling, and her thin nostril as wide as it could stretch. I see them as clear at this minute as I saw them sweep past me then, close to my shoulder, so close that a strand of her hair—the only truly golden hair I've ever seen on a grown woman—drew across my cheek as the wind lifted it.

"Padre, padre! The touch of that one strand of hair shook up all the thought in me, till I'd have stood up to be shot without a word just for the right to kiss the rest of it, and all the while there was she, drawn and grey like a woman in labour, all

for one look she'd got of the face of that ragged, fever-sodden scout out there, two lengths forenent me. Padre, even when you're dead you'll still not know the length and the breadth of what a woman will do and be for a man.

"Well, by she passed, and in she passed, and then I got a chance to look at him. It's little you get of a sign in him when the thing happens that knocks other men gasping, and all I could see in him was that his face had taken on the same look I'd seen in it sometimes by the camp fire; when he'd have five minutes to sit by it before turning in to sleep, on the few nights he wasn't out scouting. Ye might look at that look for an hour or a year, and never find out what's behind it, though ye'd give a month's pay to know. There's the patience of time, the pride of all hell, and the high-and-mightiness of Lucifer in that look, covering—what? He knows and God knows, and when we think how much we'd give to know we're still left wanting. He'll tell you a hundred tales of his life, but the tale that must lie behind that look—that's the tale you never hear him mention.

"But I'd no sooner seen it then than I turned square round, as if I'd forgotten something, and back I hurried into the post-office, for I wouldn't have gone away without seeing her again, not if St. Patrick had offered me the drink Macarthy lost. And there she was, her face to the wall as if she was studying the grain of the plaster on it, and her lips twitching and her bust heaving like a sea. Love or hate or fear—whatever it was she'd got, she'd got it deep, and I slipped out again quick to be with him, for I felt in my bones that where he was, there I'd see the master cards of this game played on the board.

"I was none too soon. He'd already taken his rein from the Kaffir, and was just swinging up into the saddle himself.

"'Right!' cries I, loud enough to catch his ear, as I took three long strides to my own stirrup. 'I'm sorry to keep you waiting beyond patience.'

"'Well,' he said, as if he was considering, 'I was just thinking I ought to go out to the regiment after all.'

"'Don't think any more, then,' says I, as cheery as a cricket.

‘Just ride across this square with me instead, and down to a house in a street to the left yonder, where there’s a room that opens on a garden that ye’ll not soon forget.’ And with that I was mounted and alongside of him, knee to knee, as our horses pushed through the crowd and past the market-place.

“He came so quiet that I felt sure he hadn’t been thinking of running away from the woman when he mounted to go to camp, but he never said a word more that would give me a lead; good or bad he never opened his mouth again till we came to the house, where there was a widow—half Irish, half Boer—and her daughter that I’d got acquainted with on the day we took the town, and they gave me the bedroom again that I’d had before. ‘I think it will be just the room for your friend,’ said the widow; and began to prepare it at once.

“And still the scout never said a word, but put up his horse in the stable, fed him, and then brought his saddle into the room with him, and took off his belts, and leaned his carbine and bayonet against the bed-head, all as methodical as if he were out in an outpost. That’s his stubbornness.

“Next he washed himself, and then stripped and rolled in between the sheets, and only then, when he was on the broad of his back, and had stretched himself straight and crossed his hands on his breast, and his eyes were opened straight up at the varnished ceiling—only then, when he looked for all the world like a corpse between the sheets, did he make a sound or a sign that he had anything in his heart to hurt him. It was then he let his breath go out through his nostrils with a rush so long and heavy you’d think he’d been holding it in his lungs ever since he looked at the woman. And after that he said—what d’ye think? Why, nothing in the world but ‘This room—and these people. Doctor, one should get well in two sleeps here. It’s good to be here; so clean and cool and quiet the room, so soft-voiced and kindly the family. And that rose there, looking in at the window. Doctor, thank you.’

“I’d been making myself busy with my medicine-case, so he’d not suspect me of watching him; but when he said all that about the place and nothing else, quite as if the finest woman

in the world hadn't looked him straight into the two eyes not twenty minutes before, well, padre, I felt beaten—clean beaten.

“‘Is there no friend in the town you'd like to see, or send a message to?’ said I, as straight as a bayonet.

“He didn't shift a line of his body or take his eyes from the ceiling, or even take time to consider. Out it came, but quite deliberately. ‘No, doctor; I don't know of any friends of mine being in Bloemfontein.’

“‘None?’ said I. ‘Are you sure there's nobody who'd like to see you?’

“‘No; there's no one I'd like to see, thank you,’ said he as evenly as you like—‘unless it's someone from the regiment,’ adds he for an afterthought.

“Padre, I felt like saying ‘D——n the regiment!’ and in any case I had to get out of the room for fear I'd let my impatience come out.

“‘All right,’ says I. ‘In that case I'm just off out to report myself to the P.M.O., and perhaps I'll call at the club. You'd better sleep while I'm gone, and there's the bell if you want anything.’

“‘Thank you, doctor,’ says he; ‘I think I will sleep.’

“That finished me, and I went out quick for fear he'd hear me say a big word. You can see how he'd beaten me. I'd asked him if there was nobody who'd like to see him, and he'd answered that there was nobody he'd like to see. With anyone else I'd have picked him up on that, and asked him to notice what I asked. But he had that fifty-thousand-a-year look on him, and you can't ask him more than he cares to answer when he looks like that.

“So out I went. He'd beaten me there, but he'd made me just so much the stiffer to try somewhere else. And I remember yet how the doves were cooing in the garden, and how the sound of it was coming in at the window as I left that room.

CHAPTER IX

OF THE LADY'S MAID WHO CAME TO THE THRESHOLD WITH A
MESSAGE, BUT TURNED BACK

THE doctor paused, being minded to light a cigar, and while he was about the cutting of it my ruminance broke forth in a question.

"Doctor," I said, "are you sure the lady was not mistaken? In his ragged and forlorn condition she may have mistaken him for someone else."

The doctor's smile came free and easy at that, and he blew a long cloud of smoke and watched it rise half-way up the tent-pole before he spoke.

"Faith, padre," he said, "it's less you know of women than a lone man should, if that's what you think of them. One of them will have ye, sure as murder, if ye don't soon learn more of them than that. Sure, a woman knows the one man of them all by his walk and by his stalk, by the build of him and the stand of him; by fifty hundred things and more you'd never think of. And when she's known him by every one of those things, there's still the one thing of all left—there's still his eyes. Ye may shave him, or shear him, or paint him, or stain him, or trim him any way you like, but she'd know him by his eyes when ye've done your farthest, and this woman looked this man fair and square in the two eyes of him."

The doctor's assurance was too much for me, so that I was fain to nod; but there remained another doubt yet.

"Still, doctor, all that is when she is in love, you say. Are you so sure, then, that she was in love?"

This time the doctor all but laughed outright as he met my point.

"Padre, padre, I misdoubt but ye've been reading these penny novelettes, where the heroine hides her love, not only from the man, but from everybody else. But this wasn't a novelette; this was the living life itself, and in the living thing a woman can't hide it when she comes suddenly forenent the man she's really loving. If she can, she's not a woman, or she's not in love, and that's flat for you. Why, my boy, if she could keep the shine out of her eyes, or the blood out of her lips that makes them fuller or thinner according as she's sweet or fierce, there's still the way she stands or moves or sits, all because she's trying to be too natural so that people won't notice it. There's the very way she lifts her head, or turns it, or picks a thing up or puts one down. If she's a fine-hearted woman she'll do it softer than sunshine at home in April, and if she's the other sort of woman, still she'll show it to anyone that's looking for it. Come, padre, ye'll have to catch up with the procession, or ye'll be bagged as a straggler."

I nodded my submission. The doctor seemed to have so very much knowledge of women, though my aunt has said to me since that he must have been talking to women and taking for gospel all that they told him. However that may be, he there took up his story again, his elbow on the little canvas table as he held his cigar away and watched the faint curl of smoke rise from it between him and the candles.

"Well," he began, "as I was saying, I'd been at the club some time, and had a drink or two with a man or two, before the next move came into my head. In those days, if ye've heard of them, the pipes and the bugles used to give us a skirl and a blare across the square and back a time or two at sunset, and that was the excuse to make it the fashionable time and place for the fashionably-minded ones to gregarate, and prowl their eyes on one another, man and woman, to see if they could make any impression on one another; but you know human nature, padre, or you're lucky."

"Well, and if I went round the crowd at skirling time, small

doubt but I'd see the woman, airing her airs, with some gilt-edged, red-tabbed staff specimen or other beside her, trying to look superior to the situation. Then I'd soon see if there wasn't someone I knew, or could tackle, to tell me who she was and all about her. And a better scheme than that ye wouldn't want, under the circumstances. Faith, I took another cigar to admire it through the smoke of.

"Whether I was entitled to that cigar I'll not swear, quite. Anyhow, if the scheme didn't catch the lady, it caught the lady's maid. Or no, the boot's on the other leg—it caught me, for it seemed I wasn't the only clever one in Bloemfontein that day. There were two of us, no less, and the other was a woman, trust the sex for that.

"You see, while I was wanting to see my lady, my lady's maid was wanting to see me, and she'd thought of the square, too, and there she came and found me prowling, with a raging eye on every fine girl there. Heaven help my Irish blood, there was more minutes than one when I clean forgot what I was looking for, because my eyes wouldn't be dragged off some of the girls in white.

"By that token, I can't just say how long I'd been wandering and staring, when up came this prim little woman and stopped in front of me.

"Smooth hair she had, with a well-set mouth and grey eyes, and she checked me with a look before she spoke.

"‘Sir,’ she said, ‘you were riding across the square with the Captain to-day, and he looked very ill. I couldn't get near enough to speak to him then, but I must see him, for I have something of the greatest possible importance to tell him. He'll never forgive me if I don't find him now and tell him, so I have to ask you to tell me, please, where I can find him.’

"Said I to myself, ‘The Captain, heh?’ but I knew right enough it was the scout she meant. And she was Welsh, too; I could hear it in her accent and see it in her face, and I hadn't the least doubt in the world but she knew the top and bottom of this secret if she'd tell it.

"All the same, I knew she'd never tell it for the asking,

though she was stopping me to use me on the business of it. Neither would you trick it out of her by way of vanity or foolishness. She was too quiet and steady-looking for that. So the only thing there was to do I did—I spoke her fair and open. ‘He’s under my care,’ says I. ‘I’m a doctor, and I’ve got him to bed in a house here, trying to care him. If you like, I’ll give him your message.’

“‘Thank you, but——’ said she, and she stopped, and I saw in her face she was refusing. But, before I’d time to put in a word, there came a twinkle into her eyes, like the flash of fish leaping in a Shannon pool, and out she spoke, but not in English.

“‘Twas more like the sound of the little river I used to catch trout in at home, when I was younger than I’ll ever be again, and she hadn’t finished speaking before she was smiling and dimpling like half her age at me.

“‘Do you think you’ll remember the words, and won’t make a mistake?’ said she, as quick at the joke as if she was Irish herself.

“‘Well, now,’ says I, ‘if you were to sing it, perhaps I’d remember the tune.’

“‘Then get the Captain to sing it for you,’ said she. ‘It’s a verse of an old song—and it’s true wisdom besides. But truly I must see him, and give him the message myself.’ And as she said that you could see the lines growing into her face with troubling.

“Pleased I was to see the lines come; pleased to the bone to see her in such dead earnest. I’d got it into my marrow that I was in the middle of some big romance, and that romance I was to see straightened out, here in Bloemfontein, before this day was burnt through. And so this woman, coming to me like this, and being so earnest, quite followed the tune I’d pitched to myself. ‘Captain’ she’d called him, though we’d seen long ago that he’d been more than Captain at some time or other, and now she wanted to deliver her message in secret. It was going finely.

“But I kept my face as wooden as mud, and says I, as matter

of fact as sawing your leg off: 'Very well, miss'—though she was thirty odd—'I'm just going back to the house. If you'd like to come, I'll take you there, and you can see him yourself.'

" 'Thank you,' says she, and away she steps with me as prim as prisms again, and never another word out of her mouth all the way to the garden gate. She had all the Captain's trick of keeping a shut mouth when I wanted her to be talking.

" Then, all at once, as we got there, some terror or some doubt of what she was doing struck her. It was all as if she'd been walking up to be hung, and had suddenly seen the hangman step out with the rope in his hand. I might hold the gate as wide as I liked, and wait for her to come in till I died of grey hairs and respectability, but never a foot was she putting through that gateway till she'd bargained me out of my chance.

" What way did the room lie in the house, and what way did the door lie to the room, and where were the bed and the windows, was what she wanted to know. 'Hello!' says I to her with the easiest smile I had in the bag, 'it's murdering him you're after, is it? Couldn't ye hope in the doctor for one more day? I'm doing my best.'

" 'You needn't laugh, sir,' she said. 'It's not easy to face him when you are meddling with something that is no business of yours, except that you were born in his village and knew him as we know him.'

" 'Ah! now,' says I, thinking here ~~was~~ my chance to learn something, 'is he so bad a landlord that ye're all afraid of him like that? In Ireland, now, his tenants would get together and shoot him.'

" 'They would not,' said she like a shot. 'If he were a landlord in Ireland his tenants there would get together and shoot you if you meddled with him, for they'd be as strong for him as we are at home, the few there are of us. But tell me now about the room.'

" Well, I'd learnt something that was no news to me, for you haven't to know him very long to know he'd be a headlong good landlord. However, 'twas time to take the next step and answer the woman's question. 'The room's on the left there,

at the other end of the passage,' said I. 'You go in, and there's the bed to your left, behind the door you're holding open, and the foot of it is towards the window that looks into the garden, where the doves are in the trees and the rose is on the wall.'

"The window is in the opposite wall to the door, then?" said she.

"It is," said I, 'and the head of the bed is to the wall the door's in.'

"Thank you, sir," says she, grateful as a dog. 'And now if you'll go in first, and stand by the window and say something to him, so that he'll answer and I'll hear the tone of his voice before I come in (and so that he'll be looking at you when I do come in, instead of turning his eyes straight into mine before I've got my first foot down in the room), then I'll follow you and try to say what I want to say. But don't whisper a word to him that I'm coming.'

"Mighty queer the thing was getting, padre, but I could see the woman was all but trembling with sheer nervousness, and the only way to get her in was to fall in with her notions, whatever they might be. 'Right,' says I. 'Come on now, and what ye've said, that shall be done. This way.' And away I led her up the path and up the steps, on to the stoep, and through the door. An' no matter how strange the thing that was going to happen would be, ye may take your oath it wouldn't be half as strange as I expected.

"Well, it was sunset by then, and ye know the sort of sunsets we get sometimes out here on the feldt, sunsets that set ye thinking that nothing matters, or set ye wanting to go howling for fear of something ye don't know what.

"And that's the sort of sunset this was, and it was coming in through the open window, red and gold and purple, and his face facing it, and the purple on his countenance till you'd think of nothing but a dead man that had been shot in the head.

"For he was lying there on his back in the bed, just as I'd left him lying hours before, not a line shifted and not a muscle stirred. Stretched all his length under the white counterpane he was, his toes up and his hands crossed on his breast, till you'd

swear he was a corpse, only for the eyes of him that burned like rubies in the sunset light. And the quiet was that quiet over him, and over all the room, that ye couldn't think again of anything but the dead as ye stepped in like I did, half afraid of putting your feet down in the hush of it all.

"He didn't move his head as I stepped in, but just his eyes came sideways and saw that it was me, and then went back, out through the window, and out through the branches of the peach-trees, straight at the wonderful sky beyond, that had every colour there is on it, as he'd once said to me, from apple-green and gold-dust to the flames of the Sword of God.

"Padre, it seemed as if my mouth stuck and I couldn't say a word, try as I would. But when I got to the window I looked round at the look on his face, and it was so set and solemn that my eyes went straight from that to the strong and solemn sky in the west, and for the first time in my life I said something about such a thing.

"'Splendid!' said I, my eyes back on his again.

"Just that one word I said, and just that one word he answered, but so quiet and so deep you'd think you were hearing it in a cathedral. 'Splendid!' said he.

"Just as he said the word I saw the woman on the threshold, but at that tone she stopped as if a thrill went through her. Her face had been white as she came to the door, but then the white went out of it, and the natural colour came again. Yet she didn't come in. Perhaps while you might take two breaths she stood there, a strong look growing in her face, stronger than I'd thought could be there. And then without a sound back she turned, and out she went again.

"He's taken too much quinine in his time to be quick of hearing, and so it must have been the look in my face that told him, for he spoke like a shot. 'Who's there?' says he, as if he was a sentry on picket, challenging.

"'A servant,' says I. 'Perhaps she wanted something. I'll go and see'; and with that out I went, though I knew he'd think it funny I should trouble about a servant.

"She was in the front garden when I got there, and a strong

will was on her like a passion, though she was fumbling with two letters in her hands. 'It's no use,' said she at once. 'I won't come in. If I gave him the message it would only make things worse. As soon as I heard that tone I knew that he'll never turn back, never turn back again. It made me remember that he's in the right. If it was he that was in the wrong then it would be all right; I'd only have to say one word and he'd stand up out of that bed, as he did to come to the war, and he'd go and say that his punishment would be just, whatever it was to be. But it's not he that's in the wrong, and so it's no use. As soon as I heard his voice I knew that he's remembering still, and that he'll keep straight on, and I'm glad that he will, for he's right.'

"'Well,' said I, 'as ye've told me so much, perhaps ye'll tell me enough more to let me make head or tail of it all. What's it all about? Is it some quarrel between him and the lady I saw at the post-office, when we were there just after noon to-day?—though she doesn't look the class to be troubling after a private soldier.'

"'The class!' says the woman, with the quietest scorn I ever heard out of a servant. 'Her mother only married her father for the money his grandfather made. She's got a picture of her grandfather, the Earl, in her room, but she knows that the picture of her other grandfather is only famous all over the world because he had money enough to get a great artist to paint it. And she knows too well just what both pictures are worth to her, when she thinks of the dark rooms of Llys Rono and the pictures that hang in them, pictures of the ancestors of this one you call a private soldier. But what did she say to him when they met?'

"'Not a word. Neither of them spoke,' said I.

"'Then neither will I,' says she, downright and decided. 'Neither will I, and neither will you, doctor; not till I've seen you again, at least. Promise me that, sir?'

"Well, of the two I was pretty certain I'd learn more by working with her than by speaking with him, so I said yes at once. 'Oh, whenever you like or never, it's all one,' says I.

"She nodded. Evidently she'd thought me safe from the start, for she was letting her mind run still on the meeting at the post-office. 'So, she had seen him then?' said she. 'I was sure she had, and that he hadn't bent a hair's breadth. I was certain from the temper in her face all afternoon. I've told her, I've told her often. The men that come to the balls and the calls in London are not the same breed as the breed of Llys Rono. They haven't the pride; they haven't the blood in them; to choose once and choose for ever in that once. She would make him choose, though she knew there was no choice, he being the son of his fathers. That's why she hates these other men so, because they'll do what he'd never do. But still she thinks she's only to show herself willing to forget the choice she gave him, and then she can be again what she was before. Well, she'll see, and we'll see.'

"The woman was burning with excitement, in spite of the way that she kept her feet still in one spot, and kept the two letters in one hand in front of her. I thought I'd hear it all if I could but keep her talking, so I was cunning enough to agree with her. 'Well,' said I, 'I can tell her that he's the stubbornest man that ever looked a fight between the two eyes.'

"'It's not stubborn,' said she. 'It's that he chose his road through this world long ago. And if you like to walk with him along that road, why, you may if you're decent, and he'll be finer than fine company. But if you don't like the road, and if you'd like some other road, why, you may take it, and he'll never say a word against it. But he'll not take it, he'll keep on his own road. That's him that's lying in there.'

"And I couldn't help saying, 'That's him to the life, that's him to a hair,' for now that she'd said what she'd said I seemed to understand many things that had made me impatient with him before.

"'It is,' said she. 'As you'll find well before you're done with him. But now give him these two letters. Just say they were left here. Say they're from the curate, and then he'll open them. If you don't he may burn them, now that he's seen her. Good-night, sir,' and before I could get a word out of me she'd

left me there, with the two letters in my hand and many a wonder in my head.

"There was one thing, though, that I didn't wonder about; I knew. I knew the woman had hit the absolute nail on the head when she said he was one who'd chosen his way long ago, and whoever wanted to be with him must walk that way, for he'd never walk any other. But there was another thing I did wonder about, and that was how any man born of woman could look at that wonder of a woman with the two blue eyes and then think of his own road, or another road, or any road or any other thing in the world but the eyes of her, and the hair of her, and the face of her, and the foot and the hand of her, and the smart figure and the whole marvel altogether she was. Sure, the man that could do that is not Irish, anyway, that I'll swear to. And, as I say, I wondered at that then, and as often as I think of her now I'm wondering still." The doctor paused and shook his head as he said it.

I, however, was not wondering on that head. I was picturing him lying there, with the blood-red sunset on his face, still as the dead, and only his eyes burning redly to show him still alive in the hush of that quiet room, while his heart was remembering the woman he had just met again, and his soul was thinking on the choice he had made when she set herself in the scale against—what? That was the thing I was wondering—what was the thing he had chosen, even to losing her?

Whether the doctor could tell me I could not guess, and it was plain that he meant to tell his tale in his own way. Meanwhile, I remembered about the two letters from the curate.

"I am just wondering about the two letters," said I, then, to the doctor.

"Ah, that's nearer to sense than my wondering, for it's a wonder that can be settled," returned the doctor genially. "I'll tell you about those two letters now."

"Thank you," I said.

CHAPTER X

OF THE ROSE THAT WAS JUST OPENING AT NINE OF THE CLOCK, ON
THE MORNING OF FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1899

“THOSE two letters,” went on the doctor—“those two letters had neither stamp nor postmark, but just the name and no address. ‘They came by hand all the way, then,’ said I to myself—that is, if they weren’t written here, an’ if they’re not all a plant of my lady’s.”

“Plant or no plant, I took them in and gave them to him.

“‘It was two letters for you,’ said I. ‘Here they are.’

“‘Thank you, doctor,’ said he, and took them very courteously.

“But instead of opening them, or even looking at the addresses, he laid them down on the bed, and so I stood beaten again for a minute, for I’d clean forgot to say they were from the curate.

“But the dark comes so quick in this country that I had no more than five minutes to wait before it was time for the lamp, and when I’d lit it I put it on the little table by the head of the bed.

“‘There,’ said I, ‘now you can see to read your letters. The messenger said they were important, for they were from the curate.’

“He came to life at that.

“‘The curate!’ said he, and he picked up the letters and looked at the addresses. But he never said a word about their having come by hand, though that was a point he wouldn’t miss, and all he did was to open the first of them and take out the inside, and that way, if ye please, we’d come at last to something

that could shift him, for besides the written sheets there were two picture postcards, and as soon as he looked at them he stared, and his eyes widened, and his lips and his whole face softened like a girl's, and he handed the first card to me with the softest tone I'd ever heard in him. 'There's something to look at,' said he.

"I took it and looked at it, and if it was much or if it was little, it was still the picture of an old-looking house in wild-looking grounds, set where there were a few level acres between the mountains and the sea, for bush and tree and ivied rock and precipice went straight up behind the house, and a curve of the coast, showing the edge of the sea, lay in front of it a few fields' breadth away. 'Llys Rono' said the two printed words at the bottom edge of the card.

"I looked from the picture to him and nodded, and he handed me the other card. 'That's the house at close range,' he said.

"This second one was a picture taken from one corner of the little lawn, so close that you could see the details of the building, and there it was, a strong house, built in the old days of defence, with its gate-house and its two turrets at each end of the great hall. It looked as if it must have seen a deal of fighting in Cromwell's time, if not earlier.

"'That looks like a house with a long story to it,' says I, as I gave it back.

"The words hit him in a soft spot, and his face shone for a minute.

"'It is,' said he softly. 'It is my home.' Then, as if those two cards had made him eager for more, he opened the other envelope, saying, 'The curate takes these photos; he's a very good man at the job. Here's another he's sent;' and he sat up as he spoke and took out another card, and dropped the envelope on the bed.

"He was taking a glance at it first before passing it to me, but it wasn't that minute or the next one when he did pass it over at last. Faith! the thing he saw on it must have gone through him, though he stuck it so well that even a doctor could

hardly see how he stiffened as he sat. And when at last he let his breath go, he let it go so softly I shouldn't have known it if I hadn't been watching. He'd break an Indian's heart if one was trying to torture him.

"Then he said, quite steadily, 'Here's another house,' and he handed me the card.

"I looked, but this house was a different thing entirely to the other. For one thing, it was set in a goodly park, and had a softer rise behind it than the other. For another thing, it was a fancy-built modern mansion, one that would need some thousands a year to keep it going by the look of it.

"'An' whose house is this?' says I.

"'It's one I can see from my turret windows,' says he. 'It's Vron Aig, my neighbour's house, but I have never yet broken the Tenth Commandment over it.'

"'Nor would I for the house itself,' says I, 'unless I could have the fifty thousand a year the old boy must have had that built it for himself to live in.'

"'He'd twice that and a deal more, and his only son died as a boy at school—diphtheria or something.' There seemed a deal of sorrow for the old boy in the scout's voice.

"'Were you at the same school, then?' says I softly.

"'No, I never knew the lad,' says he. 'It was while that house was building that it happened. It was years building, and it was years again before the man would come down to it. The thing killed all the spirit out of him in the end. He was a decent sort, and I had him to dinner often when I'd be at home.'

"'Had he no other child, then?' says I, a bit touched for the old boy with all his money, seeing the scout's voice had a deal of feeling in it as he told the tale. 'Had he no one of his own to heir that splendid house and all his money?' And while I was speaking I was looking for the name of the house at the bottom in the usual way of a picture postcard.

"And because the name wasn't there, I turned the card over in my hands, and, behold ye, instead of the usual line about the address, there was another photo on that side! This wasn't a postcard at all.

"I heard the scout's voice answering quietly, 'He left a young widow for his heir,' but I wasn't following that at all. My eyes were sticking too fast to this new picture, for I'd found it was the house again, but this time with a view even closer than the second one of Llys Rono. And it wasn't that I was seeing that some contractor must have made his fortune out of the chiselled stonework and the windows copied from famous ones; it was that at the second glance I was seeing a girl, a woman, in the centre of the picture, and no other woman in the world was she than my lady of this afternoon.

"'Ah!' says I. 'A young widow, did ye say? Well, though I'll believe ye that ye never broke the Tenth Commandment to covet your neighbour's house, yet ye'll not expect me to believe that ever you kept it whole in the face of his wife, or his widow rather—though I don't think widows or daughters are mentioned—not if this be she'—and I handed him the card again, with that picture facing him.

"He's stubborn, padre—he's as stubborn a man as you'll meet when it comes to biting on the bullet and taking punishment. But, even so, he's not brass. And what colour he had ebbed slowly out of his face as he held that card before it and looked, and looked, and continued looking, as if he'd never be done.

"The picture didn't give the whole of the house, or even the whole of one side; it couldn't. It just showed one of the finest chiselled of the windows that jutted out from the first floor like a bay-window, if that isn't *lèse majesté* to a window that cost so much. And at the left side, as you looked at it, this window opened, and you stepped out on to a little stone balcony that ran along a few paces, where, at the end, there came up a great clump of stems of rose-bushes to cover the wall, from there to the window, with a tangle of leaves and flowers.

"The architect hadn't intended any such truck as roses to be patching his design—one could see that without looking twice—but if he'd seen that picture, he'd just have sighed and said nothing, for there's two things in this world you never know what they'll destroy next—the act of God and a smart society

woman. Nothing's sacred from the whims of either, and this woman looked—well, the architect would have felt thankful she'd gone no farther than roses.

"There she stood, by the open window she'd just stepped through, and she'd cut off a rose that was hanging from the wall at the height of her cheek, and she was still holding her hands there, the rose and the scissors in them, and ye needn't go far to guess why, for the lace of her sleeves had fallen down, and was showing two arms and two wrists that you couldn't take your eyes off except by looking at the rest of her. And, chief of all, her face was turned to you smiling, as if it was you were the man she was cutting that rose for.

"That is to say, padre, that as the scout held the picture, the eyes and the lips and the whole fair face of her were smiling straight into his, as if he were the one man in the world that rose was for.

"And I was watching him and he was watching that; I was keen on him, and he was forgetting me, forgetting that room, forgetting everything in the world but the face he was looking into. It went home; that face and that smile went home. He'd got it deep, padre—he'd got it home to the bone of him, and the light settled slowly out of his face like red-hot iron cooling, while he looked at that picture with eyes that missed nothing.

"But he was game—game right down to the ground. Hard and hardily he spoke, his voice ringing deep in him as the words came clean and clear: 'That is my neighbour's widow, and I did covet her, commandment or no commandment. She was his wife a month when his horse broke his neck. She's been his widow two years now. She's the Heiress of Vron Aig, the people call her.'

"He stopped for a minute, and I was just putting in a word when he went on again: 'That photo was taken within four days of Friday, the 22nd of September last, for that rose was just opening at nine o'clock that Friday morning, and it was a rose of a kind that passes in seven days.'

"Padre, I had the man there naked before me at last, for he'd

forgotten me quite, and he was sitting there, staring at the picture, reading like a scout, and remembering like a man that will never forget. And it was not the words he was saying, but the tone and the manner of them, and the look of his face as he said them, that's what I was guessing him by. And I was saying to myself as I looked at him, 'My lady, my pretty lady, you had your man if you would, but now I think you'll pray on pilgrimage at every shrine from here to St. Peter's, and still you'll never stand again where you stood at the dawning of that 22nd of September, for then your feet were on the heart of this man, while now you may take the heart out of your own breast if you will, and throw it to roll under his feet as you see him coming, and yet, for all the fact that he'll never forget the woman you were, he'll step aside from that heart and pass on, as if it were a child's toy lying in the road. You had your chance; you threw it away. The grace of God may recover it to you still, for God may work what miracle He will in this world that He made. But is the grace of God with you? Are you the sort that He works miracles for?'

The doctor broke off, his hands busy with his cigar, but his mind busy with the scene he had just been recounting. I, too, kept silence for a moment, my mind also watching the scout upon the bed, as the doctor had pictured him, sitting and staring at the card, staring ever, till presently, from wondering what thoughts had been in his mind, I fell to wondering anent the date he had specified so minutely.

"Doctor," I said at last, "is that date of any particular importance to the story?"

"Faith, padre," returned my friend at once, "it's of all the importance in the world. I've heard him say, and I know it for a fact, that he was in Cape Town the day the war broke out. Therefore, if he saw that rose hanging beside that window at nine o'clock on the morning of September the 22nd, it means that he must have caught the boat from Southampton on Saturday the 23rd, or he couldn't have been in Cape Town on the 11th of October. Now, the house where that rose is growing stands in Wales. To catch the boat at Southampton on

Saturday he would have to leave Wales on Friday morning and get to London by Friday night, so as to get his ticket, and so forth. All of which means that when he looked at that rose he was on his way to the train that was to fetch him to the war, for he was one of the few who knew for absolute certain that the war was coming off."

The doctor had not foregathered with scouts for nothing. His reasoning left me feeling that I knew the rest of what was in his mind.

"Then you suggest, doctor, that it was there by that window, when he called on her on his way to catch the train to take him to the war, that she gave him his choice betwixt herself and something which she set herself in the scale against, and you mean that it was there that he refused her? Is that it?"

"To a hair," assented the doctor.

I hesitated.

"But may it not be that it was because of that choice that he came out to the war?"

I desired greatly to be sure on that point, it was so important. The doctor answered dogmatically:

"No, padre. I know the trains. He hadn't time to go back and pack up and still catch the train that would land him in London that night, and I know he was in London that night, because there's a rather famous story of how he got his passage. You'll hear it some day. It's him all over. Besides, he was ill in bed with that fever I've told ye of, and he got a wire that morning, the minute the wires opened, as I've heard him say, telling him that if he was to be in time he must catch the next day's boat. Remember, too, the maid said that he got up out of bed to come to the war."

"And can you tell me what the choice was, doctor?" I asked, eager to know.

"That's a thing I can't tell, for I don't know," returned my friend. "However, there's something I can tell you about the two of them there in Bloemfontein—a thing that goes through me yet as often as I think of it. But if you don't mind I'll take another of your good cigars while I tell it."

Very readily did I pass the cigars to him.

"Thank you," I said. "I shall be most glad to hear as much as I may of his strange story."

"Thank you, padre. And strange story, did ye say? Faith, one part of this struck me as strange enough. And yet it's not so strange, after all, she being what she is, and he being what he is. But here's the tale," ended the doctor.

CHAPTER XI

THIS WOMAN THAT WAS IN LOVE WITH HIM, AND WANTED TO STRIKE HIM WITH THE STICK THAT WAS IN HER HAND

“WELL,” resumed the doctor, “I thought I’d better say little to him that night, and that little had better be something I had good standing for. So I played the doctor. ‘Old man,’ says I, ‘it’s about time to see about getting some hot milk for ye, and then ye’ll be for sleep. I won’t be a minute’; and out I went.

“That was to give him a chance to read the letters and pull himself together again before I came in. I stayed out quite a while, too, but when I came in he still had that one picture in his hand; the other two were lying on the bed, and the two letters were still in the envelopes. He wasn’t looking at the picture, though; he was looking straight out of the open window into the dark of the night, and never a word had he to say, except when I handed him the milk. Then he said, ‘Thank you, doctor,’ quite prettily.

“And never a word more had he to say that night, either, except that, after he’d taken his milk, and I’d laid some medicine on the little table by his bedhead, he put the photos back in the envelopes, and laid them down on the little table, too, and got down under the counterpane in the old way like a corpse again.

“‘Good-night, old man,’ says he. ‘Thank you.’

“‘Good-night, old man,’ says I myself, and with that I shaded the lamp and left him, with a bell handy that I’d hear if he rang it, for I was sleeping in the next room.

“So there you were; and when I got up next morning I

found him sleeping heavily, with the back of his neck in a lather of a sweat. He'd had a bad night by all the signs, and the letters and the photos had been stowed away somewhere out of sight, if that was any evidence in the case, though whether it was or it wasn't I haven't a word to say.

"Well, and I left him sleeping heavily, for I had to go and report myself to the P.M.O., and I wanted to get my letters from home. But when I came back, having breakfasted by the way with a chum I met at the P.M.O.'s, he was still sleeping. Bedad! thinks I, that's queer; but still, since there's no better medicine in this world than sleep, why, I'll just let him sleep on, while I take the chance of reading my letters from home.

"So out I went to the stoep, and set a chair at one end of it, with the trellis, still thick with tea-roses, to shade me from the sun, and also from anyone passing in the road, unless they looked mighty close. I was for having a pleasant half-hour to myself, ye'll notice.

"There I was, then, with the letters all read at last, and my head running so full of the pleasant fancies and feelings ye get out of your letters from home that I'd almost forgotten Bloemfontein and the war altogether. And that's the minute, lo you, when here comes none other in the wide world than my lady of the rose on the balcony.

"She was coming along the street, her maid half a step behind her, and this was the house she was coming to; ye could see it plain by the way she kept looking at it, roof and sides, door and windows. 'Right,' says I to myself; 'you shall just walk in yourself and find him sleeping. He's not handsome, wanting the shave and the wash he'll get when he wakes; but it's himself, and that's what you're wanting, if I can put two and two together at all.'

"In at the gate she came, her maid behind her, and, padre, when I looked at her there I felt a bit proud of belonging to the breed that had her for a specimen; but ye'll know the feeling of it. And then up the three steps to the stoep she came, and on into the house she went, as though any of the people of it

might be furniture or nails in the wall for all they mattered. And then I wasn't quite so proud ; but ye'll know the feeling of that, too, padre, for ye'll have seen the way our women from home stalk into any Boer house, as if it were a kennel of dogs for all the courtesy they need show. They're as bad as the Boer women who went to Natal with their husbands in the beginning of the war.

"Well, they were gone in, and I had to stay out there and give the romance its chance, though I believe I'd have handed in a year's pay to be sitting in the stalls watching them on the stage, and seeing by what handfuls she'd throw the dust on her head to make him forgive her for fear she'd spoil her beautiful hair.

"All I could do instead was to sit in this veranda and imagine the play, painting it as gorgeous as the best at the Adelphi. Ye may believe I was giving myself plenty for my money as I put the colour into my fancy.

"But, behold you, I'd no more than come to the tears of her imploring him, when out comes she herself, white and red and grey with rage and a dozen other torments, while the woman behind her was just the colour of murder itself as she looked at her mistress in the back of the neck. And if my lady had looked neither right nor left in coming in, she surely kept her eyes to her front in going out, though I doubt she could see for the wet in them.

"'Ructions !' says I to myself. 'It's him that's done it, too—it must be, the stubborn omadhoun ! Faith ! but I'll go in and ask him if he thinks God intended him to be as big a fool as he is.' And up I got, and in I went.

"But in the passage by his door who should I meet but the widow of the house, and she as angry as either of the other two. 'Faith !' says I to myself, 'is it the women themselves that had the row, while the man was safe beyond them ?'

"Not they, though. Trust one woman for not letting another woman turn her back till she's seen the man. The widow put me right with the first word.

"'What sort of woman is that, to come marching into my

house, as the common soldiers would never do, and then go on to a sick man as she did?’

“‘Ho!’ said I, ‘is that what she did? And what did she do, now?’

“‘Look there,’ she said, and she pointed down at her feet, and by the piper, padre, there were the two halves of a thin little gold-mounted walking-stick of polished wood, that I remembered my lady had carried as she came in.

“‘Glory!’ says I. ‘How came that there?’

“‘He was sleeping,’ says the woman, ‘and I heard the two women come in and march right in to his bedside, so I came quick to see who was meddling in my house. And there she was, a yard from his bedside, and the first look I had at her I thought she was going to cry.

“‘But if she was she changed it, for the next look I took she was getting black with rage. And she began to speak, though habit was strong enough to make her speak hushed, as one does when a sick man is sleeping, but yet she spoke angrily.

““So that’s what’s come of your impossible nonsense!” says she. “Every counter-jumper and valet comes out here as an officer, and you, lying there like a dog with distemper, have to salute and say ‘sir’ to them, and run messages for them and for every ineffable puppy that wears a star on his shoulder. You fool! you fool! with all your pedigree behind you—you impossible fool! you fool!” And with that, her rage got so high she lifted her walking-stick as if she’d strike him.

“‘I made a jump myself to stop her, but the other woman was quicker than even my thought. She was like mad as she snatched the stick from her and smashed it in two across her knee and flung it out of the door, where I’d stood aside just in time. Then she stuck her blazing face into the other woman’s face, and lifted her ten fingers as if she’d tear her to pieces.

“‘That woman didn’t try to defend herself.

““Don’t you be a fool, too, you Welsh cat!” she said.

“‘But the Welsh cat said nothing; she just took her by the

shoulders, walked her here to the door, turned her face along the passage, and "Out now!" she said, not with her tongue, but with the motion of her hands. Then her mouth spoke.

"“You dirt!" she says. "You dare threaten Llys Rono with a stick! Take your money—that's all you've got—and go! Out!"

"“She said one more thing as she was going, for she looked back over her shoulder and spoke to me. "Don't tell the Captain that this woman lifted a stick as if she'd strike him. Wait till I come again."

"“Then out they went; and here's the pieces of the stick, and there's him still asleep."

"“Still asleep?" says I. "That's a queer thing if he is;" and into his room I went with two strides.

"One look I took at his face, and then it struck me all at once to look, too, at my little medicine-case that I'd laid out, if you remember, on a table in the room the day before. I looked at the sleeping-dose I'd left in it, and, sure enough, it was gone. He must have taken it.

"He knows a lot about medicines, for he's often had to carry a medicine-chest himself in different parts of the world, and there I saw plain enough what sort of a night he'd spent. He'd lain awake, thinking and thinking and thinking, till at last, when dawn came in and him awake yet, he'd just got up, looked in my chest, taken the only dose left, and gone to sleep. He couldn't have taken it before dawn, or the effect would have spent itself by this time, so far that the noise of the women squabbling about him would have waked him.

"I turned to the widow, where she stood in the door with her eyes betwixt him and me.

"“It's the sleeping-draught that he took this morning instead of last night," says I, making truth itself stand for a lie.

"Well, there was nothing to do till he waked, but the sight of the case reminded me that it wanted refilling, and there would just be time before he waked again. So out I went with the case.

"But you know how things are when you're part of an army

at war. You go out of the door, with an hour or two in your hand to do something you want to do, and half-way down the street here comes an orderly, his right hand saluting and his left clapping a blue envelope into your hand, and that's the end of your two hours in the first five minutes.

"And that's the way it was with me. I had to go off at once to a field hospital I was to be attached to, and see what was what and who was who there, for to-morrow we'd be moving. And that way it came to be afternoon before I got back again to the house.

"The widow was sitting on the stoep as I came up the path, and the first word I heard was :

"'Your friend got up, saddled his horse, and rode away, saying he'd send you a note this evening.'

"'The dickens he did! Tell me what happened,' said I. 'Has that infernal woman been here again?'

"'Not till after he was gone,' says the widow. 'He's been gone about half an hour, and he'd hardly turned one corner out of the street before she turned the other into it. I told her he'd just ridden away, and so she went, too.'

"'But what did she say when you told her?' says I.

"'Not a word—not even "Thank you." She just shut her mouth tight and went,' says the widow. 'She is in love with that man if you want to know, and she hates him because she can't make him crawl to her.'

"'Did she tell you that?' says I.

"'Did I need telling?' says the widow quietly. 'I'm a woman, too.'

"'Faith,' says I, 'he's a lucky man to have such a woman running after him.'

"'Is he?' says she. 'At any rate, it will serve her right if she gets him. He'll tell her what he wants, and he'll let her see he's got a shambuck on his wrist at the same time.'

"'Oh,' says I, 'then you think he's a man that will beat his wife when he gets one?'

"'I don't,' says she. 'He'll do a deal worse. He'll set up his will, and he'll let her beat her head to pieces against it—if

it's this woman. She'd be all right if he'd carry a shambuck and give her a good dozen every day. That would help her to act decently. But he won't do that: he's too stubborn. He'll win absolutely or not at all, and he won't even help her to surrender by knocking her down.'

" 'Well, mother, ye seem to know a deal about him on such a short acquaintance,' says I. 'He must have been talking to you and no mistake.'

" 'He did. It was when I heard him stirring, and I went in to ask if he'd have his milk.

" ' "No, but thank you," said he. "I'm sorry to have to say I must get out to camp."

" 'The things I said to him then, doctor—all the arguments I had I gave him for full ten minutes. But it was all the same: he just said he was bound to go.

" ' "You shan't," says I.

" ' "I must," says he.

" ' "I'll not let you," says I.

" ' "Do you see these breeches?" says he, laying hold of them. "Well, you'd better go: I'm going to put them on."

" 'The sweetest smile in the world was on his poor sunken face; the softest touch of devilment you ever saw. But while I stood, with my mouth open almost, he stuck one thin foot out of the bed and I fled.

" 'But I only got to the door when a thought struck me, and I looked back. There he was, the breeches out of his hand again, while he was drawing himself up to get out of bed easier. That was my chance. I just darted in, snatched the breeches and the rest of his clothes, and out again, banging the door to behind me. "Now you'll stay," says I triumphantly, and I listened to hear him swear.

" 'But he didn't. What he did do was to chuckle just once to himself, and I got so hot, thinking of the tale he'd tell of me, that I just fled out to the stoep and into the outer chamber to lock the clothes in there.

" 'But there I stayed for a minute, as angry as I could be with the tale they'd all be telling about him and me and the

breeches, till I looked out of the window for something, and then I nearly dropped. For there was that man, bare-footed and with a blanket round him like a Kaffir, except that he'd got one corner of it thrown over his head for shelter from the sun. And he went straight into the stable.

"There I stood, ready to cry with vexation, and determined that I wouldn't give way and let him have his clothes; but in two or three minutes out he led his horse from the stable, saddled and bridled, and up he got and slowly he began to ride away, and I noticed that his bandolier was across his chest one way and his carbine the other way.

"And he never turned an eye once at the house, but straight ahead of him he looked, as everyday and matter of fact as if a grey blanket was his regular uniform, not the ghost of a smile or a frown or annoyance on him; and away he rode till he was actually out of the gate.

"Then I had to scream, for I saw the obstinate thing was going to ride through the town in that costume. "Come back! here's your things, you obstinate—pig!" I nearly said, I was so angry.

"But he turned his face to me with such a wicked smile of triumph that I shook his clothes at him, I was that mad.

"Oh! didn't they fit you?" said he, soft as a five-year-old baby.

"I just sat down and cried with vexation. But when he saw that he rode back and got down off his horse, and took my hand.

"Come now, madame," he said, "I'm very, very sorry to have distressed you so. But——"

"And there and then he began to tell me how he really had to go, clothes or no clothes, and that he really knew how really good it was of me to try and keep him from getting up, but really he had to go, and fever was no great thing if a man had work to do, and so on, and so on, him so grave and gentle all the while, standing over me, till I quite forgot that he was standing there in a blanket, and the tears came into my eyes

again at thinking how wicked I was to try to keep him in bed, when all the time he was so ill and he had to go.

“‘So at last he dressed and went, and he’s going to let me know how he goes on. But I’m sure it’s that woman’s at the bottom of his going, all the same.’

“‘Mother,’ says I, when she’d finished her long story, ‘I believe if you were that woman you’d just offer him a shambuck and say: “Flog me till you’re weary.”’

“‘I would not,’ says she like a shot. ‘I’d never do a thing to uncover that rock that’s in him. I’d just go to him and I’d say—oh, the things I’d say!—asking him just to forgive me this once, whatever it was, and the tears would be in my eyes and the sorrow in my voice till he’d almost cry, too, to comfort me. For he’ll never stand out against pain and sorrow. He’s too soft for that.’

“‘Mother,’ says I again, ‘I believe you’re holding your thumb for him yourself.’

“‘That’s more than I’d do for you then,’ retorts she smartly. ‘But—is there any woman in the wide world that wouldn’t hold her thumb for him—except this one that’s in love with him and wants to hit him with a stick?’

“So there I was, padre, with him gone, and my lady knowing he was gone, and me with just one hour to myself, and then I must be gone too. All I could do was to hope that there were women enough holding their thumbs for him to keep him safe till he could settle this other woman.”

The doctor might have said more, but I was too eager with a question.

“Holding your thumb! What does that word mean, doctor?”

“It’s a regular thing amongst the Boer girls, and a saying with them, that when their lover is in any danger they close their hand with the thumb inside for him, and that’s supposed to keep him from getting killed. Don’t you remember how it used to be at Rome with the gladiators? If the women cocked their thumbs the gladiator was killed, so I suppose that if they shut their thumbs inside their fist that saved him.”

It is very strange," I answered. "But did you not try to see the Captain again before you left Bloemfontein?"

"I saw him all right, try or not try," answered the doctor. "And I'll tell you how, too, for that was the strangest thing of all the strange things I saw then."

CHAPTER XII

OF THE FOOL WITH THE BAMBOO CANE, AND THE WOMAN WITH THE RIDING WHIP

"I'D no great hope of finding him," said the doctor, "till I remembered that there were two or three things that he wanted to get at the shops, before we started on the general advance north. Then I remembered, too, the crowds there'd be in every shop, and the time it would take to get served. In just about two shakes of a lamb's tail I was back in the saddle and off for Maitland Street.

"Never a sign of him did I see in any shop there, though, or anywhere in the street, and when I'd come nearly to the street that leads to the Raadzaal I thought it was no use looking any further. And, of course, that's just the minute he crossed the street ahead of me, riding along from the Raadzaal, and keeping on to cross the Spruit, and get away to Rimington's camp at Lawson's Farm.

"As ye'll expect, I was all for clapping spurs to my grey and overhauling him, but the regulations were stiff against galloping in the streets, and so I could only press the pace to everything short of a canter, which meant that I wouldn't overhaul him till near the Cathedral.

"And, right enough, he was crossing the bridge by the time I got to the cross street behind him, for my good luck wouldn't let me lose anything that ride. And sure it was luck to the neck I was in, when out of that cross street rode my lady and her red-and-gold tabbed staff officer, not two lengths ahead of me as I came to it.

"It was plain they had intended to turn my way, and perhaps go on to the Raadzaal, for the pretty man with the red tabs did turn my way and nearly rode into my horse's head, evidently expecting common me to give way to his grandeeship.

"But my ould grey just kept on, and out of the corner of his eye, or the back of his head, His Prettiness saw that my lady wasn't coming this way at all, but had quietly turned for the bridge too. He didn't look pleased at that, as he turned and galloped after her to catch up again.

"Well, if a staff officer could gallop over the regulations, then why not a doctor, thinks I. In any case I galloped too, and that's how I came to hear him say sharply, 'I thought you said we were going the other way.'

"She looked at him as if he was a cur pup that didn't behave. 'I wish to speak to this gentleman in front,' she said offendedly, and she made a little move, to show it was the scout she was meaning.

"Now, padre, when the British officer is a gentleman, as he so often is, he's a pattern to the world, as you know. But when he's a bounder, he's a bounder beyond the bounds of words. This fool might have seen by her look and her words that he'd better look to what he was doing. Of course, it's quite likely it was just her look and her words that ruffled him into what he did. In any case, he was carrying one of those thin little bamboos, with a bent handle, and what must he do but clap spurs to his horse, catch up to the scout, and with a 'Hi, there, you fellow!' lean forward and flick him on the shoulder with the cane.

"Quicker than light the scout wheeled his horse, his face and his eyes like a volcano with the side blown out for flames. He was so blazing with fury that he couldn't even whisper, let alone shout. I saw it all, and the murder in it, and so did she, for somehow we both galloped, too, the minute we'd seen the bounder gallop.

"But when I saw the scout's face I checked dead, his face was so ablaze. His spurs were going in and his hand was going out to snatch this guttersnipe out of the saddle into the dust,

and ride back and forth over him till he was pulp. That was the thing I saw, and I wouldn't have given ye tuppence for the fool's life.

"But before the one could escape or the other clutch him, my lady was alongside the fool, her ivory-handled riding-whip in the air, and I hear it whistle, whistle, whistle yet, as she slashed him across the face once, twice, three times, while her voice came out choking with passion. 'You carrion! You dare to lay *your* touch on *him*! You hound!'

"The third stroke was only the last because the fellow got it across an eye, and he let a shout out of him and whirled his horse, so that it caught the fourth stroke across the quarters, and away it tore back up the street with him, while she pressed her horse up till she was face to face with the scout, her face as white as his was grey with fury, and I thought for a moment she'd strike him, too.

"But 'twas her tongue she used, nearly foaming. 'Do you see what your miserable masquerading comes to, when every ineffable puppy out of Sandhurst or the Militia, or worse, can flick you with his stick as you would not touch a dog, or set you to fetch and carry like a lackey? I'll not stand it, if you do. If you don't promise to end it this minute, I'll wire straight to the War Office, or go to headquarters here at once, and end it myself.'

"He looked at her with a face like red-hot iron to meddle with.

"'Are you finished?' said he, hoarse as a crow.

"'Not with headquarters,' snapped she.

"'Are you finished with me?' he said, hard as flint.

"'I am for this minute,' she flared, whiter still with fresh rage.

"'Then let it be the finish for ever,' said he; and he reined about and rode on his way at a walk, the stiffest man that ever put a knife into his own flesh and watched the blood run, and kept his mouth shut.

"She looked at him riding away, and as soon as she saw that he was truly going the rage went out of her face as the wind

goes out of the sails of a ship. Once I thought she was going to spur after him, and once I thought she was going to cry. But in the third look she whirled her horse about and galloped away, not towards headquarters, but back by the way she had come, and I could swear that she was going to her rooms to cry.

"Off after him I spurred, forgetting everything in the world but that he was turning his back on the finest woman in the world, and she mad to have him.

"'Turn back! turn back!' I said to him. 'She's come seven thousand miles to find you. Would she be here if she hadn't?'

"'She would,' he said. 'She would be here. If I were in London she'd still be here. Wherever the limelight is, there she'll be. It's because the newspapers have their keenest ferrets here, at work for their biggest headlines, that she's here. It's the breath of life to her. She's here because the limelight is here: it's an accident that I'm here too.'

"'Then why is she crying?' said I, sharp as a flint.

"'Crying?' says he quickly, and holding his rein. But he slacked it again and pressed along his road again, and the saddest smile you ever saw on a man came in his face. 'She's crying with rage because I will not stand in the limelight with her. She's crying with rage because I am here to fight for my country, instead of for myself, as most of her friends are. She's crying with rage because she is she and I am I, whereas once I thought she was another woman and she thought I was another man.'

"I would have spoken still again, but it was no use. He put out his hand to me to shake.

"'Thank you, doctor, for all you've done for me, and all you'd like to do. But I'm not turning back; I must go on. Till I see you again then,' and he shook my hand and dropped it and went on alone, and I knew that nothing in this world could turn him back but himself."

The doctor had stopped, with a gesture as if that was the end of all things, but I would not let him cease so. "What became of the lady after that?" I asked.

"I don't know," replied the doctor. "He'd gone out to his

regiment and I had to go to my billet, and I was done with Bloemfontein and all in it till a couple of months ago.

"And the queer thing was that, as I got out of the train when I did come back, and walked up the street, who should be the first man I met but the scout, or the Captain, rather. For when I looked in his face I saw that there was neither faint nor fever in him, and when I looked him up and down he was as straight as a lance, and so smart of his clothes that he must have just stepped out of Thomas's, no other, and on his shoulder there were the stars of a captain. 'Ah, now!' says I to myself. 'So you turned sensible and made it up with my lady after all, did ye?'

"But what he said was: 'You're the one man in the world I wanted to see, doctor. I've got a squadron in Rostron's Horse, and Rostron himself is getting a column together, with yeomanry and infantry and guns and what-not, and we want a decent doctor very much. Come now with me, and dine with Colonel Rostron.' And before I could say, 'Give me a night to think it over in,' I was sitting down with the Captain and the Colonel, and here I am."

"Then she got him a commission after all?" I said, a great disappointment stirring within me.

"Faith! no. Rostron told me that very night what a job he'd had to get him to take the star. I know myself that many a one had tried it before and failed."

"But had he never made it up with her?" I asked again.

The doctor shook his head. "I've never chanced my arm and asked him straight out; but I've watched and I've noticed, and I'm dead certain now that he's neither seen nor heard of her from that day to this."

I was both pleased and disappointed at the answer; I did not question why. "What do you think will be the end of it all, doctor?" I asked.

"Faith, now, that's more than I can say. But it haunts me, some way, that he thinks he may be killed before the war's out, and he'd like to have me with him then, so he can send a message to her at the finish. It's only my notion, though."

I shook my head slowly, but in perplexity only, not in dissent. The doctor, however, thought it was dissent. "Ah! padre," he said, "ye've never seen the woman. If ye had, ye'd never shake your head at a Christian wish like that. Ye'd be as I am, and hope he'd make it up at the finish, just as I do."

I smiled: but still I found myself unable to hope that this woman should triumph over this man. For this woman was evil, of that I was persuaded. She could not so have estranged him save on some point of the finer honour.

So we rolled into our blankets and slept, the good doctor breathing in dreams an hour before my own consciousness would surrender, for my imagination would not cease from following after the problem of this man and this woman, or my soul from praying that he would never fail from the stern path of honour he must have chosen, when he turned his face from her face in the hour when she tempted him, on that 22nd of September, 1899.

CHAPTER XIII

OF A SPARE DAY IN THE CAMP OF ROSTRON'S COLUMN, AND OF
MR. MANSEL

IT was late when I awoke next morning. Truth to tell, it was the doctor who caused me to awake, for he had already been to the hospital to look at one or two of the worst wounded, so that he could carry the latest news to their comrades when he should presently return to camp.

He had found the men all doing well, he said, and, as if that were the keynote of his day, he filled the time of breakfast with an endless play of conversation, full of the merry turns which make an Irishman such pleasant company. In the end it was still with a droll quip that he rode away, when breakfast was done, and duty forced him to go.

Truly the Captain's friends seemed all worth knowing, from trooper to Colonel, thought I, as I watched this one of them cantering away to camp. Indeed, as the next hour wore on, that thought worked closer and closer in my mind, so that it was not nine of the clock yet when I called for my horse and rode away, also for Rostron's camp, where those good souls were lying.

There, however, disappointment was mine, for the Captain was ridden out, with the Colonel and a party of men, to try a new machine gun which had just been added to the column, as well as to test some fifty or sixty newly-joined men in shooting.

It seemed that on the feldt, some three or four miles farther out, were many herds of springbuck, and the manner of this column was to let the machine-gunners shoot at the buck at

various ranges, giving them the venison they killed as their reward. Similarly, the recruits shot at the buck, first firing singly at the closer ranges, and then by volleys at single buck at long ranges. Here again the venison belonged to those who killed it, and the rule was found to cause great improvement in the shooting of the men, they taking a great interest in the matter, desiring to hit a buck.

All this was told me by Mr. Mansel, Senior Lieutenant of the Captain's squadron, who would by no means allow me to return empty of courtesy shown. The other two Lieutenants were away coursing hares in the neighbouring flat, their hounds being half a dozen of various colours and sizes, agreeing in nothing save that each possessed enough of the greyhound blood to be more or less of greyhound shape. South Africa was truly marvellous in the strange collections of all sorts and sizes of dogs which each farm seemed to possess.

Mr. Mansel himself had been out with a rifle before breakfast, and had shot three of the great ground grouse called kurhaan, and also four partridges, all of which were cooking now against the return of the coursers, whose sport, as we could see, was slacking. It must be added that some fifty or sixty men in all were taking part in the coursing.

This manner of spending an off day in this column was not less marvellous to me than all the rest belonging to it. In the column I had been with the Colonel would have been ill with horror at the bare thought of such things. But then, as I sadly knew, he would also have been ill with horror had he found himself in some of the positions which this column constantly schemed to achieve in respect to the Boers. Kit inspections and rifle inspections were ends in themselves with him. With this column they were only means to an end which would allow of an inspection which he could never hold, namely, the inspection of positions captured. Need it be said which column I held to be best serving the Empire?

When the coursers returned from their sport, I found the other two Lieutenants quite the men one would expect, remembering that they owed their commissions to the Captain's choice. One

of them was an Australian Irishman, and one a Canadian Scotchman. Mr. Mansel himself had come to the war from somewhere on the Paraguay river, in South America.

Besides myself there were four other guests, Lieutenants of other squadrons. One of these was a New Zealander, one a trader from all the isles of the Pacific as well as the Indian Oceans, for he was born in Ceylon, the third was from the Eastern Province of Cape Colony, veteran of all the Kaffir wars of his time, and late a trader along the upper Zambesi; while the fourth was an American, Wyoming born, and here, as so many Americans were, "because the old breed was on the warpath."

To sit in such company and to hear their cheerful outlook on war and life, as it rang in their comments on daily things, was a new inspiration to me. Here were no society men perforce enduring the war till they could resume the life of Mayfair, as it is shared by the army. The picture of a dancer from the music-halls, or an actress in tights from the theatres, was not the greatest thing in the world to them. What had been before the war, or what would be after it, were no subjects of conversation with them. The war itself was their concern, and all their discussion was of things belonging to it.

As to their views on the rest of the army, their great admiration was divided between the artillery and the British private in close battle: their great contempt—nay, they had more than one, but I will not name them, lest I should be led too far from the story I have to tell.

Moreover, when the meal was ended, instead of a gramophone the Canadian Lieutenant took out his violin, and gave us several beautiful airs from the masters of music, while afterwards the New Zealander, who had a splendid voice, sang us some songs which were not only sentimental, but were also greatly enjoyed by the rest of us, who joined in the choruses as unashamed as village boys at home. To-morrow night they were to march at dusk to attack a certain position at dawn. Being always ready they therefore had this interval to themselves, and so were living it cheerily.

Small wonder that when I rode back to the other cheerless

column, though I had not seen the Captain because I had to leave before he returned, I yet carried away a cheeriness in my heart, to which I had for long been a stranger.

Nor will it be reckoned any marvel that, seeing Mr. Mansel riding in Mooiburg that evening, he being there on some business of supplies, I begged of him that he would favour me with his company to dinner on his way back; to which he consented with the ready courtesy one might have expected.

It had not been my intention to detain my guest long after dinner, seeing that he must needs return to camp that night, but while we sat at supper he had so many tales with which to answer my questions about the war, and so often those tales had the Captain for their central figure, that in the end I could not forbear asking a question which brought a reply far beyond what I expected—it brought me the first part of the story of the other of the two women I have spoken of in connection with the Captain.

Last night the doctor had told me of the lady and the rose, as he called her. To-night Mr. Mansel told me the story of the girl with the rose, as he called her. For I said to him, "You have told me you were one of the scouts under the Captain in the earlier days of the war. Would you mind telling me how he managed when he happened to come in contact with the Boer women or girls, while on some dangerous piece of work?"

"Well, you see it depended on circumstances," replied Mr. Mansel readily, "and circumstances are not quite the same in any two cases. And the women and girls differed so. Some cursed us, some screamed, some went for us with a frying-pan or a mealie-stick, some made us coffee and gave us a meal and talked with us, asking us how the war was going and what was going to be done about the country and the people. Some of them gave us a lecture. Some were in a quiet fright, and we had the pleasure of comforting them—they were usually the ones who asked us to take something to eat. One gets a deal of respect for the Boers by scouting about amongst their women folk, I can assure you."

I pushed him closer to the point. "But of all such scenes that you remember, which is the one your mind recurs to oftenest?" I urged.

"Oh, a splendid one; the one of the girl with the rose," he said, his face lighting up as if he saw again a scene that had roused him to enthusiasm.

"The girl with the rose," I repeated. "Come, Mr. Mansel; that sounds to be of the very breath of all true romance. I shall thank you indeed for your story if it be at all as fine as its title."

"Well, you shall settle that for yourself, for you shall hear it now," said he, a reminiscent smile coming into his face.

Here I ought to say that Mr. Mansel had once been a shining light of the Oxford Union, before the wandering airs of many lands had drawn him hither and thither to the outermost beaches of civilization, and that thus his speech was conglomerate of the phrase and diction of many a colony and strange backwater of adventurous life, as well as carrying memories of his callowest flights at Oxford. Yet, as there was no rule in all this way of speech, so the reader must hold my memory excused, and let me use only such diction as will show the speaker for an irregular, with all an irregular's cast of mind and inherent way of thinking. And thus we come to the story.

"Well," began Mr. Mansel; "it was when we were on the general advance from Bloemfontein to Pretoria, and you'll remember that, except at Vet River, our centre was just route-marching along, for we on the wings were doing the argument, outflanking the Boer main positions every day, so that they had to go away from in front of our centre every evening and leave the main road clear. Old Fireproof had a gang of us as scouts—and himself a sort of chief of scouts—attached to Curly Hutton on the left wing—you've heard of Curly, the father of the modern M.I.—and we'd been doing pretty well at our own special job.

"Well, and after a while French came across, and we made a regular army of the left on that western flank, always a day or two ahead of the centre, and always having a little shooting as we went.

"Then we came to an ugly stretch of country, with only one or two passages through it—bad passages at that—and the best of the Boers, Zarps and their sort, very stiff in front of us, and planting themselves in any good holding-ground to stop us.

"Well, you know, we couldn't afford to be stopped on that wing. It simply would not do. A check of a day there would throw the whole forty-mile front out of its stride. Imagine the row if we'd got hung up!

"Now, old Curly's just hairy with initiative, fairly bulging out into every other General's way, if that General doesn't keep up with his chances. He just figured up his information, looked at the map, and then flung his scouts out wider and farther—flung 'em clean through to the other side of the Boers, three days ahead of the army. That's the way to use scouts, if the other Generals only knew it.

"And one day Old Fireproof came in at noon from the hairiest kind of a thirty-hours' prowling round the Boer centre, to see whether they'd fight in that position or not. He'd brought some information that quite changed the army's job, and Old Curly heard it, thanked him, called him pretty names, and then flung the map open in front of him. 'Now, here's another thing I want you to do,' says Curly. 'You'll get in here, behind these Boers in front, and cut the telegraph-wire between these two places. Then remember that I want to find out just where we can get waggons through this stretch of country—it's a bad bit—and what Boers are in it, and what they're going to do about our coming through. Of course, you'll not forget anything else that's going, and above all you'll let me know, as soon and as often as you possibly can, whatever will do us any good to know. But you know the sort of thing—the usual thing, you know. You'll probably get touch with R—— (he's somewhere over there with half a dozen scouts strung out among the Kaffirs), but you'll take a man or two with you in case you don't.'

"'Very good, sir,' says Old Fireproof; and he turned to go. I was within a yard or two of him, and I touched his arm as he

passed. 'Me?' said I, asking him plump and plain. 'You,' said he. And so the thing was settled.

"Well, most of us reckoned on getting nights in the blankets in our turn, say every other night, or one in three at the outside. But I don't know when he'd had a night, or a day, except in the saddle, hard at it, wearing down horse after horse and man after man at the work. And he was plumb worn out; dead on his feet nearly: done in if ever a man was done in, or if it had been any other man I ever saw but him.

"The three fellows he'd had out with him were lying stretched out, dead asleep, with the scoff untouched beside them; and when he tried to eat a mouthful, his gorge rose at it, and he couldn't, from being so far gone. All he could do was to take a drink of coffee while his Kaffir saddled a fresh horse, the Brigade doctor standing and looking at him and shaking his head.

"But I knew it was all right. His body might be bent and swaying, where he sat cross-legged in the sunlight, waiting for his horse, but his brain would keep on working, holding fast to the job in hand like a bulldog.

"When he stood up to mount, the doctor's orderly came running with some powders and tabloids. The doctor poured a powder into water and made him drink that, and gave him the tabloids in a paper and told him to take them at a certain time, and then we swung up to the saddle and went.

"And as we rode away he was pouring me full to the muzzle with the information and suggestions Old Curly had been pouring into him, while I was getting ready to start. That's why scouts can work so well for Old Curly; he tells them exactly what he's working for, and so you know what part of your information will be most valuable to his purpose, and what part is likely to set up new purposes in his mind. You can do things for him because you're not working blind."

Lieutenant Mansel paused, as if to enjoy the relish of naming one general who knew how to use scouts. "If you look up the records, padre, you'll notice that Old Curly never once had 'to regret to report' getting any sort of a smack; in fact,

he never lost so much as a Cape cart. More than that, he twice pulled other Generals out of a bad hole. It's true he had only Colonials, except for Alderson's M.I., and better men than that M.I. never went into the field. But still, Old Curly banked on his scouts; he told Old Mike Rimington so before he went away.

"And that's another man that knows. You give me an army with Old Curly in command, and Old Mike for his wing-division leader, or turn Mike loose himself, and I'll not ask you for sixpence to go to the circus with at all. I'll be in it already."

As I listened to this digression of Lieutenant Mansell, ex-scout, I recalled some of those stories I had heard of the treatment of scouts in the earlier part of the war, and I did not marvel that Mr. Mansel should digress. Instead, I noted that he pulled out his pipe, and so I produced a certain packet of a special smoking mixture, which my aunt sent to me regularly from home.

"I think you will find that good," I said. "My aunt sends it to me."

He smiled at that, though he reached out for the tobacco with the readiest courtesy in the world. But I smiled also, to the full as pleasantly as he, for if he had a merry doubt I had a cheery certainty. He did not know my very remarkable aunt, while I did know this remarkable tobacco.

And so, as I say, I passed the packet with pleasure, and if he took it with foreboding, still that would only be a matter of a moment before it would be set right.

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE GIRL WITH THE ROSE

LIEUTENANT MANSEL filled his pipe with the mixture carefully, lit it and blew five or six whiffs, first carefully, and then with a relish, while the strained look disappeared from his face. "Sir," said he, "your aunt is a very good judge of tobacco—or of a tobacconist."

"Ah," I said, "I will write and tell her. She will be very glad to hear it: she is a very shrewd and sensible woman."

"Very shrewd and very sensible, if she sends you a regular supply of that tobacco," assented Mr. Mansel.

"The supply has been accumulating here while I have been out on trek," I answered. "You must take some with you as a present to your squadron's mess. I really wish to send some to the mess."

I chose this way because, while one officer may refuse a gift like that, a mess cannot refuse, save in special circumstances. And so here. "Well, padre, the mess will most assuredly move a vote of thanks, provided you'll promise to come and dine next time you're within reach."

"Thank you," I said.

"In the name of the mess then, not 'beans,' but 'thank you,'" said Mr. Mansel, most courteously. "And now about this thing I was telling you of, where I rode out with Old Fireproof—only he had another name with us then, though it came to pretty well the same thing.

"Well, on that trip we had all the narrow squeaks you want to hear of—but a man's heart was always worn pretty thin by

the time he got back from any trip with him—and we did very well. But then, on top of all the rest, see us, next evening, lying on the side of a long bush-land, and far yonder was a little town, that looked just all right and pleasant; all white houses and tall trees and gardens.

“Gad! we were hungry, and thirsty, and ragged, and dirty, and fevery, and sleepy, and I was thinking of the oranges on the trees and the roses still hanging on the verandas, and the fine girls in white walking splendidly down the street in the cool of the evening—can’t you imagine it all? And I thought, too, of the drinks at the hotel, and the good meal, with the glass and the white linen on the table, and a wash and brush-up before one sat down. And that was just the minute when Old Fireproof spoke.

“‘Old man,’ said he ‘we’ll have to go into that dorp yonder. There’s a Scotchman living in it who’s been having a pretty rough time since the war broke out. He’ll be full to the back teeth with just the information we need. We’ll wait till the town is sleeping to-night, and then we’ll ride in and see.’

“‘Oh!’ I said, coming out of my picture. I’d just been wanting to be in that dorp; that’s true; but not in the way he was proposing. However, I knew it would be no use trying to argue with him. ‘All right,’ he’d have said, ‘you stay here till I come back, and if I’m not back by such and such a time, then you get back to camp and report to the General,’ and off he’d go alone. You’d better not start out with him unless you’re ready to go absolutely the last hair’s-breadth with him.

“So I said: ‘That’s all right, only we’ll have to go like shadows. The town is just buzzing with Boers. There were already forty scouts of Vandam’s there, watching this flank, as we found out this morning. And now you can see the men of the local commando, stringing back from the fighting line to see their wives and families this last time, before our front gets here to-morrow and drives them past. We’ll hardly be able to ride in to-night for fear of trampling them, they’ll be so thick on the ground.’

“ ‘Yes, that’s just what’s going to make it so safe for us,’ said Old Fireproof, or Old Steelribs as we called him, because nothing could shake his heart. If he were to scout through Gehenna, to bring out the Old Gentleman as a prisoner for the intelligence people, he’d be sure to show you that what you’d really need in going with him would be a cloak and extra blanket. And you would, for the flames couldn’t burn for sheer astonishment in watching him.

“ ‘You see,’ he went on, ‘if we’re seen riding in they’ll think we’re men of the commando, and that’ll be just the thing for us. We’ve got a good mark to know the Scotchman’s house by—two tall blue gums at the garden gate and four tall wattles along the front of the stoep. So now you’ll do a sleep for an hour or two, and then I’ll get a snatch, too, before we go in.’

“ Well, it was no use saying anything; and besides, I can’t say I worried very much. You see, as he says, when there’s half a dozen of you at a job like that, then there’s half a dozen chances of disaster, because any one of the half-dozen may fail at the top moment. So, if there’s only two of you, then there’s only two chances of disaster. And if one of the two is Old Steelribs, then you know there’s only one, yourself, and besides that you know that he won’t come away from the job without you, which is everything in this world to you when there’s only two of you. We were two men, and that town was full of men, but we ought to go in, thought he, so in we had to go.”

(Here I, listening, set my ears wide and said not a word. It was one of those rare moments when one hopes to hear, perchance, the secret of what it is that lies at the root of the desperate deeds which some men do in such matter-of-fact fashion. It seems all so very simple to them, that a blunt question throws them upon their guard at once, as if they felt themselves suspected of being differently foundationed to other men. Therefore I smoked on—but he lifted the veil no farther.)

Lieutenant Mansel went on. “So I did my whack of sleep

and he did his, and by that time it was long dark, and we girthed and rode for the town."

(That was all I heard of those hours of which your romancers make such pages.)

"Farm-dogs barked, but we couldn't help that. Cocks crowed, but those beggars crow all round the clock in this country, when it's night on the feldt. Horses stood off and whinnied, but that's one thing you must teach your horse if you're going to ride with Old Fireproof—teach him to be silent and never whinny back; if you have to yank his jaw off to teach him, you must do it. It's the one thing he'll let you punish a horse for, except, of course, real vice, which is rarer in a horse than in a man any day. So we came to the town, but we saw some lights in it still.

"When we came to the edge of the town, Old Fireproof got down and stole on afoot, leaving his horse with me, and presently he came back to say that a side way in was clear, and so we rode on in, from the southern side, as if we were two Boers coming home from the day's fighting, and keeping along the street as easy as if we belonged there and knew the house we were going to, and especially the bed we were going to tumble into till morning. That's the safe way. Men pass you then and never think but what you're all right, for they can't easily distinguish your khaki in the dark, and you always ride country ponies, if you've sense enough to be a scout at all.

"So we toddled along, keeping to the grass on the side of the street sometimes, and keeping to the shadows where there were any, but always boldly on, till we found a house with not only the two tall gum-trees by the gate—which were common enough there—but also the wattles by the stoep; a house that stood back in a big, fine garden full of trees and fruit-trees. It was a beautiful night, and there must have been a moon, for I remember the shadows though I don't remember the moon.

"Well, we couldn't leave me holding the horses in the street, because I might be noticed, and then I'd have to scrag the noticer and he might squawk before I managed it, and then the

game might be up, and we might have to go with the job unfinished. So we led the horses through into the garden.

"You know the sort of house it was, Boer pattern, and wide and roomy. You go up the garden walk and up the steps on to the stoep—the verandah—and there's the door into the great fore-chamber, and right and left, facing you from each end of the stoep, are the side-doors that lead into the wing rooms, where the outer sleeping chambers are. But the fore-chamber here was so big that the front door led into a passage, with a room right and left of it, as we could see, for the keyhole and under the door was dark, as well as the room to the right, while there were streaks of light at the sides of the window on the left, which had Venetian blinds down, so that Old Fireproof couldn't see in, no matter how he screwed his eyes.

"He came back. 'I can't distinguish a word either,' he whispered. 'But throw the reins over a branch and stand by, here at the door, while I go round and have a look.'

"Well, I waited there a long time, carbine and bayonet ready in case this was our time come for finishing, and then at last he came back. 'The stables are full of horses,' he whispered; 'but I didn't go in to count and feel if they're saddle horses, because the Kaffirs inside are awake, talking. Same with the stables of these other houses right and left of us. It's a bit awkward: this is certainly the house we want, as far as the marks go. Of course half a dozen Boers may have quartered themselves on our man, because the town's so crowded, or by way of using him for all he's worth while they've still got the chance. The point is, if they are in there, are they making him sit up while they sleep in his bed, or are they allowing him to go to bed while they sit up or sleep in the fore-chamber? I'll listen again.'

"He went and listened, and then came back. 'Several men in there, talking the Taal, and I can just see the butt of one's rifle,' he said. 'So now we must try the sleeping chamber and see if they've sent him to bed.'

"'Four men with their rifles just passed along the street,' said I.

“‘Yes,’ he said, ‘and there’s no time to lose either, if we’re going to get our information to the General in time. This left end of the house is the fancy end. The nearest room here has a long window to it, like a door, just round the corner there : it will be some sort of a fancy sitting-room. The next room further along, beyond that, has the usual window, so that will be the best bedchamber, most likely. It’s bound to have one door into the fore-chamber, but it’s quite likely to have another into this room at the corner. At any rate, that’s our one chance left. He sent his wife away some time ago for safety, so if he’s there the chances are that he’ll be alone. So I’ll step inside and see if I can touch my way along to his bedside, if that is his bedroom. You’d better stand by till I have a try.’

“‘All right,’ said I.

“Well, you know how these houses are built. The wings come out just the width of the verandah, so that, as you walk along it, you come against a room-door facing you, and you walk right in. That’s what he did, walked right along, and opened the door and stepped in, soft as a tiger in the dark.

“It was just as he stepped inside, and put the door loosely to again behind him, that one of the horses rubbed his rein loose and started to walk off round the house, looking for stables, no doubt, for he was a Boer horse.

“At the second stride I was after him, don’t doubt it, but he was round the corner before I grabbed his trailing rein, and just as I did that a broad swath of light grew slowly out from the long window Old Fireproof had spoken of, flooding across the garden in front of me.

“I looked at the window—Gad, sir !” (with this exclamation a quick and living interest burst into the Lieutenant’s tone, where before had been mere monotonous recital of matter of fact. Be sure I hearkened now with all my ears). “By Jove ! I was not two yards from that window, so that I could see in clearly, and I crowded the horse back quick between the azalea-bushes, myself with it, but never for one wink taking my eyes off the thing that I was seeing in that room. For I was seeing a girl coming across that room inside ; a girl in her night-robe,

carrying a handsome little lamp in her hand, and coming right up to that long window and throwing it wide open, perhaps four yards from me.

"But, oh! man, man! such a girl! You know what fine big girls you do see in this country, and how well some of them walk. Well, this one was the Queen of them all—she was called the rose of the town, as we heard next day—and she'd just stepped out of her bed in the chamber beyond, coming to stand at this window and look out into the night, as she'd looked a thousand and a thousand times out into the day, wondering, and doubting, and hoping, and dreading.

"It wasn't us that had waked her; I could see that plain enough. It was the fear for her country, now that the British were so close, that had kept her from sleep, tossing her from side to side till at last she had come here from pure dread, looking straight out into the dark towards where our front must be camped that night, as if she was watching that front marching this way. And she was so full of her dread of the host of khakis far yonder through the night, that she never saw the one khaki not four yards away in her left front, and never dreamed of the other khaki in the same room with her behind her. That showed that it wasn't our moving about that had disturbed her. If it were that, then she would have been looking and peering round her, and here and there and everywhere, till she'd have seen him at least.

"I stood as still as the dead and watched her, keeping the steel back behind me, as though it might flash in the light in spite of the dark silk handkerchief that swathed it to keep it from gleaming. I stood still and I just looked and looked, for she was splendid. Tall she was, and shaped as the hand of God Himself would shape a girl in her glory. White she was, all white and white again, from the white of her round smooth neck to the white of her foot, where the hem of the fringing lace half hid her instep. Dark her hair was, dark and soft as the clouds that pass at dawn, a wide floating mass that was kept from her eyes by a broad black band of velvet round her forehead, and then went spreading softly down to below her waist. And

except for the dusk of her hair, and the blackness of that velvet band, there was no spot of colour in all the picture of her, except one great pink rose pinned between her breasts; a rose that had been crushed a little—showing that she had lain uneasily, unable to sleep—but still a rose and sweet to see, and right to see, there on her breast.

“Ay, man, I looked at her there, standing at that window, in that room set with the piano and books and carpets and nick-nack things the Burgher girls go in for when they come back from college, and roses, roses everywhere; and, gad! I envied the men that stop at home, and have wives and homes and decent lives like that. And all the time I was saying to myself, ‘We are wrong. This is a Boer house, and he’s inside it.’

“Then she turned, quite slowly—but ah! the grace of it!—and she looked across the room inside. ‘Now for it,’ thought I. ‘Now for a scream, and then hell’s out!’ And I whipped up the carbine to be ready to start for the front door, and keep the gap with the steel till he got out. But I didn’t go yet; I was watching what she’d look like just as she screamed.

“But if I’d waited there for that I’d be there yet. She didn’t scream. She looked, and a swift shock shook her, with a touch of shrinking, a wilting; and just once the lamp shook in her hand, ever so little. Her soft lips parted, gasping without sound. Her eyes stretched wide, and the rose lifted and fell with the tempest of her breasts as the first flare of deadly fear sickened the blood in her heart.

“But that was only for a breath or two; just a breath or two; and then, white as a lily and proud as a swan she stood straight again, facing him, as I knew, though I couldn’t see him. No scream though: there was no scream, no cry. Upright she held herself, the soft lips softly closed again, the still, proud look challenging him where he stood. Man! what a thing it is to see a woman that God made and that towns have never spoilt: a sweet, soft, proud girl like that, that all men have to bend their necks to. So splendid!—and then think of the squealers about women’s rights! Did you ever see one of those squealers that were any-way balm to a man’s eyes to see them?

"Well, I knew she'd look out my way no more, or if she did it would only be the better for us, for if she saw me it would make her believe that the house was surrounded. So I whipped the horse's rein over a branch and stepped into another bush, where I could see inside to where Old Steelribs stood.

"I had to do that so as to know if he needed help, but I wanted to do it, too, because I wanted to see him facing so splendid a girl. You see, you're a padre, and so I don't mind telling you that I had some guess of a secret he was carrying. And perhaps you've heard that he'll never listen to anything against women as women, nor allow you to tell 'smoking-room' stories, as they call them. If that's all you can talk about, then you can join some other mess and leave his—though I heard him pass one story once in silence, because if he opened his mouth at all he would have laughed in spite of himself, it was so wickedly witty. He's human enough, and he has a humour of his own besides.

"But I don't know if some folk would have thought him anything but devil if they'd seen him just then. Yonder he stood, exactly where I expected. He had stepped inside, quiet as the dark, put the door to again behind him, and planted his back against the wall beside it, listening without breathing till he should catch the sounds in the room, if there were any. And it was while he stood that way, like a pictured figure on a wall, that she came in with the lamp. The deadly little smile, that's always on his face when he's facing deadly danger, was on him as I looked.

"Ragged and war-grimed he was, his body slack with fever and hunger, except the eyes, where his brain was watching and looking out; eyes streaked and bloodshot, but steady as eagle's eyes; considering, watching, figuring the situation up, ready to strike like lightning should any man show; ready for anything; the levelled steel glittering in his hands as he stood, just as I've seen him stand so often in those night affairs, ready to daunt or fight whatever he finds in front of him.

"Sir, the steel in his hands looked devilish, clean devilish, glittering in the lamplight as they faced each other, Dawn and

Darkfall they two, if ever the two did meet, she with the wells of life under her breasts, he with the springs of death in his hand. I thought of her rounded breasts, that swelled like the breasts of the First Mother of the World beneath the lace and the rose, and I thanked God that both he and the army behind us were British. I've seen something of some of the other sorts of armies at work ; so has he.

"It wasn't a minute that they faced one another like that, for one of them was bound to speak. It was he began it, and, sir, how do you think he began? Why, his smile, his own smile, came into his face, quick as sunlight, and he lifted his hat and bowed, just that shade of a bow that keeps the eyes still on the lady's eyes: in fact, it was for all the world as if this were a drawing-room at home. His voice can grind and clank and set your ears against him if he likes. But it can come as soft as summer, too, and soft as summer it came then. 'Pardon me, madame; I am so truly sorry to have disturbed you like this'—and as I heard that tone I knew there's many a woman strewn across this world that listens for the echo of it in her heart again, whether it's silk or sunlight that covers her breast.

"But again, that tone and manner of his put this whole affair on quite another level. There wasn't a breath of Briton or Boer about them after that. They were just a Johnny who'd blundered into a young lady's presence unwarrantably, and a young lady who'd be highly obliged if he'd remove his offensive self to somewhere out of her sight. You could see her refinement suddenly bristling against his unkempt appearance.

"But feminine resentment can't live against that smile and that deference of his, and for fear she'd lose her chance of indignation if she didn't speak soon, she had to speak at once. 'What do you here?' she demanded, using the Taal idiom for the English words.

"I wouldn't swear to the exact words, though; I couldn't, for the voice was like pouring running gold and dust of gold, all sunlit gold, all over and through you and into your blood. I was wondering after the tones instead of the words. Even Old Fireproof quickened under it, and I saw his eyes widen as

he stood. And then, as suddenly as a flash of light, he almost laughed out loud. 'As a matter of fact,' he answered, 'I'm afraid I stepped into the wrong room. You will have to pardon me—unless your father is ready to see me here for a minute or two.' (Remember that he knew the Scotchman had no daughter: he knew he was in the wrong house.)

"'My father!' She seemed to draw back as she repeated the words, though I'll swear she never shifted foot. 'What do you want with my father?' And this time I noticed how beautifully she spoke English—but all these college girls out here do that.

"'I'm afraid I want to see him.' Old Fireproof seemed to smile afresh as he said that.

"'My father!' she repeated again. 'But it is my grandfather who is commandant.'

"In that one sentence she had told him where he was: he was in the house of old Carl Villiers, the fighting Commandant. But Old Steelribs never winked or hesitated. He seemed to continue the conversation straight on—'Ah, but your father is here, and your uncles, are they not?' suggested he, quite with a flicker of doubt, as though he feared that he had been somehow misled.

"'Yes, but only one of my uncles, Christian,' she answered, quite interested at that doubt of his.

"'Still, your brothers and your cousins are all here, are they not?' He spoke with quite a soft eagerness, as though the correctness of that statement would salve his disappointment in the rest.

"'All but my cousin Coos,' she answered, growing bewildered at his seeming familiarity with the family. She never dreamt that it was all part of a scout's work, this following up the veriest hint by applying the probabilities to the situation, and testing them till, by hint, assent, or denial in the answers, clear knowledge is arrived at. Her eyes were widening upon him while she paused, her lips half open, as if doubt of him were prompting a question.

"He seized the chance of the pause and went on. 'Ah, they

are still hard at it, planning to-morrow's fight. Well, I suppose they'll be some time yet before they finish.'

" 'But they are finished,' she said. 'They are only drinking coffee before lying down,' and she seemed as if she'd take a step to go and call them.

"That was the top moment: that was the moment when I wanted to see what he'd do next. For I could only see one way out of it—he'd have to let her pass into her own chamber, on her way to call the men beyond, and then he'd slip out, shut the door, I'd whip round with the horses, and we'd out into the street, up into the saddle, and away with us into the dark, the opposite direction to our army, till we got well out on the feldt. If we got away we'd have failed to see our Scotchman, but I wasn't thinking of the Scotchman, I was only thinking that we'd still be alive, and that's a deal to a man in a minute like that.

"But I was wrong: you're pretty well always wrong if you think Old Fireproof's going back without what he came for. That was just the difference between me and him. I was only thinking of how we were still going to get away: he was only thinking of how we were still going to see the Scotchman and get our information. That's where he beats us all.

"Before she could move he spoke, and if I ever thought before that I'd seen him at his top mark with a woman I was wrong. For now his smile and his manner and his tone seemed to come over him like a half consecration, as if he were some fevered, passionate priest, weary in some church, pleading and insisting to men's ears and hearts. All the garb and the grime of war on him were forgotten, only his eyes were remembered, and his voice, for he was murmuring his words, making running music of his tones as he spoke so low and winningly.

" 'One moment; just one moment, madam,' he was saying—or something like that. 'Pardon me, but—that rose on your breast—as I came up the steps just now there must have been a rose almost brushing my cheek, for the scent of it was in my breath as I passed. And that scent; the scent of a rose, went to my heart, for there were other roses once; roses that were hanging on the wall of a high house on the grey coast where is

my home. And one rose of them I wanted: I asked someone for one of them, and—she would not. Will you, then, give me that rose now; that rose from your breast—Will you give it to me for the sake of—no, just for the sake of my longing, just for the sake of your womanhood, the womanhood that all men must worship? Will you not give it? Will you not?’ He was standing and pleading like a man worn to the bone, only his eyes were burning.

“My own heart swelled out in me to hear him, not because he had told her so plainly that he was a khaki, for his uniform had told her that from the beginning. But long before, in the beginning of the war, his horse came down with him and stunned him, and I heard the heart of his secret in the first words he spoke as he was coming round, more than half dazed still. I’d never let on to him that he’d said anything, or that I’d heard anything, and now here he was, giving this girl the key of it, and she a stranger and an enemy; except that no woman is ever a stranger or an enemy to a man that’s paid a man’s price to her sex.

“And while I listened, and while she listened, I knew well that he wasn’t just talking to get safe away. I could feel what it was. Padre, if ever the fever takes you before you go home again, then, if ever you loved a woman in this world your very bones will ache to have her with you again, just you two, in some little home where there is no outside world, nor anything but just yourselves. It’s only malaria that gives you that longing, but it was on him then, and if all the hosts of hell had been in that next room he still wouldn’t have gone from this girl with the soft lips and eyes, without getting that rose from her which another woman had denied him, seven thousand miles away. For a rose is a rose, and a girl is a girl—ay, and love is an aching memory, no matter where you go.

“And she, as she looked and listened, what could she do?—such a splendid rose of womanhood as she? What could the heart of her do but give him the rose?—for there was half an agony in that last ‘Will you not give it? will you not?’

“Slowly, then, and half in awe of a man who knew the wreck

of love, she took the rose from her breast and gave it to him.

"Gently,—nay, by Gad, reverently—he took the rose, and as he did it he stooped and kissed her hand. The wonder in her eyes deepened at that, and a rose came into her cheek, so that though she gave the rose she still kept the colour of it, as she watched his right hand trying to fix it in his buttonhole, just above where the bandoliers crossed.

"And, because he still must hold his carbine and bayonet in his left hand, it seemed for a minute as if he wouldn't manage to fix the rose with one hand, but still he stood, trying and trying, till, in her distress, she cried out softly, 'Oh! let me—hold your rifle!' she ended after the break.

"But he knew and I knew what she had intended to say; 'Oh, let me fix it for you!' she had intended to say, but shyness had stopped her and made her offer the lesser help. And he would not let her continue in distress: with a soft smile and a softer 'Thank you' he gave her his weapon to hold, while he fixed the rose in his tunic. And the man that says he was failing of his duty, giving up his weapons to that girl in that room, with a dozen men of her family only a wall's thickness from him; that man does not know what he's talking about. There were no enemies in that room; only two hearts that ached, one with memory and the other with pity.

"Then the rose was fixed, and her face seemed as if a little smile of relief smoothed it, and she handed him back his carbine with a grace of hand and wrist that he must have seen as well as I.

"'Thank you,' he said again, quietly (he can put a deal of meaning into those two words, and he did it then). 'I'll not forget. And because I asked a gift of you so sorely, and because you gave it to me, I'll do no harm to any of yours this night. If you were to call them in upon me, then the first to come would be your father or your brothers, and if I did my duty I should have to shoot and stab and kill till I were killed myself. But it would be too horrible, more horrible than you could stand, for you to see one of them drop dead, killed here before your eyes,

on the threshold of your own room. It won't do'—and he stopped and seemed to shrink at the thought, while she, watching him with all her eyes, seemed to cringe from top to toe with horror at the dreadful vision his shrinking conjured up before her. 'You gave me this gift,' he went on, 'and so, if you will still call your people in upon me, well, I cannot fight, for then I must certainly kill the first one bursting in. And if I do not fight, then I am a traitor, and should be shot by court-martial, except that your people would take me prisoner if I would let them. But prisoner I will never be. I have never yet surrendered, and I never will. I must shoot myself then if they come in : must shoot myself.'

"He held his voice a minute, looking her very steadily in the eyes, and she shrank again, and pressed her clasped hands to her breasts, as if she sickened at the bare thought of his killing himself. 'Yes, I know,' he went on. 'It would still be a tragedy to you beyond words if I were forced to shoot myself here, to save myself from shooting one of your people. It would haunt you all your life—it won't do : we can't do it.'

"And like an echo of some golden bell her voice came over his—'No ! no ! no !' her face shaking with horrified emphasis at each repetition of the word.

"'No,' he assented. 'And so, you see, there is only one way out. I'll say good-night and go, and you'll say nothing to your father or the rest till morning. Tell me now that you'll go quietly to your chamber again, and rest, and I'll promise you that I'll do all I know to get away from your house without rousing your people to hear me and shoot at me. Promise now'—and he held out his hand, bargain fashion.

"She had never once taken her eyes off his, and now she gave him her hand as if it was his will that moved her, not her own. And once he had her hand he held it for a minute while he did what he always does, tries to give something into a bargain beyond what there is any right to ask. 'And I'll promise you more,' he said. 'I'll promise you that the next time one of the Burghers fires at me, he shall have his shot free and unhindered, so that God may then judge what we

have done here to-night. And if we are wrong, then God will set the wrong right by killing me by the hand of that Burgher. If you have any doubt to-night, remember I give you my word that the next Burgher shall have his shot free at me.'

" 'Oh, no, no!' she protested, lifting his hand in fresh distress. 'You must not let him. God does not judge that way. And if He did, He would not do it this time. God knows that I am a woman, and He knows that no true woman could stand to see a brave man killed before her eyes. She could not: she could not: anything rather than that. Promise me that you will not do it—for if you did, and were killed, then it would be my fault still, just as if it were done here before my eyes. Promise!' And she almost dragged his hand to her breast in her vehemence.

" 'Yes, I did not think of it that way,' he said; 'so I promise: a man's oath. And now, good-night. I have the rose: I'll not forget. Good-night,' and he kissed her hand again and then let it go.

" Then he stood back and put out his hand behind him and began to open the door. 'Good-night,' he said softly. 'God keep you.'

" 'Good-night,' she answered, softer still, but still in that golden voice of hers that keeps wandering and echoing in one's memory, forever and forever as it seems.

" So he went, closing the door after him without a sound, leaving her standing in the middle of the room, dazed and bewildered and sweet, like the living statue of our First Mother, just created into the new world and with all Futurity slowly dawning before her. And so I went, too, stealing round softly with the horses in the dark, and leading them out into the street without a word. There we mounted and we rode away.

" Yes, we found our Scotchman at the next try, and got him to tell us all we wanted to know. It was after midnight when we rode quietly out of the dorp again and headed to go home to Old Curly.

" No, Old Fireproof didn't tell me what had happened inside,

except that when he got in he found we were in the wrong house. Neither did I tell him that I'd seen it all: what's the use of touching on a man's secret? But when we were a mile or two along on our way, he halted on a ridge that would have given us a view of the town if it had been daylight, and he reined round and looked back.

"The rose was in his hand, as I could see in the moonlight, and he lifted it and spoke to it. 'Red rose: red rose, I'm sorry now. She'll think I only asked for you as a way of trapping her into letting me go. But you know that's not so. You know why I asked: I simply could not help it.'

"Men say funny things when the fever's thick on them, and the chill of the night is beginning to get into the marrow of their bones. Some get jibbering then. He does not, but he gets like that, talking openly to himself, instead of only thinking the words. So I kept quiet: I sat still as a stone, and so did he for a minute or two, before he went on and ended—'Old rose, I'm tired: God! but I'm weary. And my heart is weary, too, as well as my body; I think the wells of my heart are done springing for ever. There's rest indeed for some man yonder—some man, but——'

"He stopped: he looked a little longer, and then he reined round again and looked forward into the night, the way he had to go. 'We must get on,' he said: 'the General will be waiting for our information.'

"So we rode on and got home to camp just before *réveillé*, and told the General what we'd learnt from the Scotchman."

Lieutenant Mansel broke off like a man who has finished his story. "But," said I, "what did the General say about the young lady?"

"The General! Why, the General knew nothing about her. You see, you give the General what information you've got, and of course you must tell him how you got it, and from whom, so that he'll be more or less able to judge of its worth. But you don't tell him your mistakes, unless you got information by them. He hasn't time to listen to yarns. In this case we didn't get our information from the girl of the rose, but from

the Scotchman, so, naturally, we only told about the Scotchman. The information was very good ; very valuable."

"Ah!" I said, and said no more upon that point. I was thinking at first how impossible it is to judge the story of the war by the special medals given for bravery. For what special medal is given to a scout as a scout ; or how, in fact, are the deeds of a scout to be brought to notice ? There are no witnesses to his deadliest danger but himself, and if he tell the story of it he is liable to be set down as a liar. I put this problem to Mr. Mansel.

"Ah," he said promptly, "I put that very point to him not long ago — for instance, the tale I have just told you, of our going into that dorp, has never been repeated by either of us since the second day after we did it. But out came his answer straight, like something he'd thought out and settled long ago. 'What does that matter?' says he. 'Christ knows, and one's comrade knows, and what does the rest matter, after that?' And you can't get round that answer very easily, padre."

"You cannot: truly you cannot," I assented. "But tell me," I went on; "do you consider that it is this secret you speak of which causes him to seek danger the way he does? Does it make him careless of danger: is he, in fact, seeking death?"

The ghost of a scornful little smile shone in Mr. Mansel's face. "Not he, he's not that breed of bird. There are men in the squadron who came to the war from God knows where, and joined the first regiment they came to. But up here on the feldt they heard some tale of a thing he'd said, or a thing he'd done, and they took no heed of the name. 'That's him,' they said, and they got out of that regiment and into this, and they came to him and they saluted, and gave him good-day in some God-forsaken language or other, and he looked at them and answered them in the same language, and nodded and shook hands, and the next thing you knew they were in his squadron. And they're not astonished at the fresh things that astonish the rest. They know—but they say nothing: they know he doesn't like it. Once, he and I were stopping overnight with another

regiment of irregulars, and as we sat by the camp fire, after scoff, one of the fellows from a wild country began to tell a tale that was become a legend there, for the wonder of the hero of it. And when he'd finished, Old Fireproof just got up with the smiliest of smiles on his face, said good-night, and went straight off to his blankets. I went, too, and just as we were getting under cover he broke into a long sound laugh. 'What's the row?' said I, and he told me. The tale we'd just heard was a tale of him.

"'Really I was eighteen,' he said, 'whereas you just heard the tale say I was only fifteen. And the same all the way through it; they've rounded and added and polished it into a regular story'—And his voice went off into a regular chuckling chuckle of a laugh again." Mr. Mansel himself chuckled at the memory of it.

"Ah!" said I, and then sat dumb for awhile, beggared of all words of further wonderment, all further curiosity. Only after awhile, for mere courtesy's sake, I asked a question. "And did you see the girl again, next day?"

"No; the information made it not necessary for us to march through that town. But it's in my bones that she'll crop up again before we've done with the feldt."

"I hope so," I said. "I do hope so."

"So do I," returned Mr. Mansel warmly.

CHAPTER XV

OF THE GREY OLD SERGEANT-MAJOR AND THE TROUBLE OF HIS SPIRIT FOR THE YOUNG LAD

ROSTRON'S column trekked the next dusk, and for many weeks I saw no more of it, though one heard of it regularly through the reports of its "kills and captures," to use the cant term of the column to which I had been attached; that column which had so few such matters to its own credit.

However, I had no longer to endure the trial of trekking with such a column as that. The chaplain of the hospital at Mooi-burg, the hospital to which we had brought our wounded, had been taken sick and invalided to the coast. I, being the nearest available man, was appointed to fill his place, and minister to the hospital and garrison, for which favour of Providence I was devoutly thankful.

Busy as I was, I still was in no danger of forgetting my two days' acquaintance with Old Fireproof's world. There were too many things in my new world to remind me of his by contrast. Yet, as I believe, I had learned my lesson from him too truly to be utterly cast down at the lack of aspiration in the outlook of those about me. These men with whom I was in daily contact were still men, and he had said that he had never found it to fail that, if he took men on the nobler side he had not found them to fail him.

Alack, there were days when, but for remembrance, I might well have doubted if those words would be found true on universal application. And indeed, it was not long before it

became almost a belief with me that they would only be found true where the one who was appealing to men on the nobler side was himself felt to be noble.

Yea, so much did this last doubt settle upon me, and so much did I brood upon it, that a great desire grew within me to hear some one of Old Fireproof's men telling some tale of him which would as consciously and unconsciously give me the men's opinion of him as the doctor and Lieutenant Mansel had given theirs in their stories. Was it all mere chance then which, on my very next contact with men of Rostron's column, gave me the fulfilment of that desire?

For it befell that, on a day when no such fortune was expected, there came in across the feldt a dozen ambulances and light vans, bringing the sick and wounded of Rostron's column, which was swinging past, a dozen miles out, on a sudden new change of direction, and had taken this chance of sending in its stricken men to the comfort and hopefulness of hospital.

At first I did not know whose ambulances these were, drawn up outside the line of limewashed stones which marked the boundary of the hospital. I had been kneeling with a corporal of Mounted Infantry who was dying, and not until he passed had I come out into the sunlight for a quiet look at the feldt, for at such moments the vast space of the feldt has power to still all restlessness of the soul, giving of its brooding quiet to soothe the sharp ache of man, man that is so readily disquieted by the coming of that to which he was born, namely, sorrow and death.

When I came to the ambulances I found that there were willing souls enough without me to lift and carry the sufferers to the tents, and so I stood and watched them pass, stretcher by stretcher along the stone-marked paths to the different pavilions, thinking no thoughts but general ones (as, for instance, the fact that each of these burdens stood for one home, far away in some part of the Empire, stricken with grief), when suddenly my mind was brought to a standstill. There, passing me, not twenty feet away, was the figure my heart knew at once for that of the grey old sergeant-major of D Squadron, "Old D," my

squadron, as my memory fondly calls it, even to this day :
D Squadron of Rostron's Horse.

He was bearing the rear end of a stretcher in which lay the shrunken figure of a lad, whose sunken face showed him far stricken in enteric, that most dread scourge of war. And, because he was so occupied, I, desiring not to intrude too rudely upon him, hastened but soberly to come up with him, and then, moreover, refrained from greeting him, or in any way catching his eye, till he should have arrived where he must lay his burden down, by which means it befell that, as we halted at the journey's end, I, too, heard the words of a thoughtless bystander, one of the convalescents, who had no right to have spoken at all. "What is the matter with this one?" he asked of those who bore the stretcher.

"Enteric—bad," answered the serjeant-major hesitatingly.

Then—as a fool will of his nature commit folly—the convalescent answered blurtingly, "Oh, enteric—bad? Then he's—" and with a grimace and a gesture he conveyed the idea that "enteric.—bad" might be interpreted as "doomed" in that hospital.

The serjeant-major had just straightened himself upright from setting down the stretcher when this vile answer was made to him, and it must have gone to his heart like steel, for I heard him draw in a heavy breath, and he turned slowly round as if to look at the familiar world again in the light of that verdict. Thus, since I was standing but a step behind him, it fell out that his face, whitening as he turned it, looked into mine unseeingly with a moment's vacantness, as he tried to regain command of himself. And the whiteness of that bold grey face, that I had seen so lionlike in the fighting at Ichabod's Kop, went so near my heart here that I stepped forward and took his hand and spoke—softly. "Nay, serjeant-major, the lad shall do well yet. There are many men recovering day by day from bad enteric in this hospital."

He held his breath for a moment before he spoke, gripping my hand like iron the while. Then, with a quick jerk of the head, he shook aside the moisture in his eyes, and—his voice

failing him in the first attempt, and coming but hoarsely in the second—said to me in answer: “Ah, sir, is it you?”

That he should remember me so quickly in such a moment gladdened me to the soul, encouraging me to fall to such kindly words as I thought would most comfort his brave spirit, for my eyes were seeing, like a halo above him, the vision of this man as he so captain-like led the men at Ichabod’s Kop, when courage and skill brought honour from a field which otherwise had been but another barrenness.

As quickly as I might, too, I got a kindly doctor to examine this lad he so loved, and the doctor proved to speak such words of cheer that at length, all being done that could be done for that while, and the lad lying quiet between clean sheets, with his head on a smoothed pillow, I was presently able to draw my grey friend away to my own tent, where I might perhaps do yet more for the relief of his oppressed spirit.

There, causing food to be set before him, with coffee and good tobacco to follow, I sat with him in the quiet, letting him ruminate till he should fall to words, unburdening himself of his heaviness in talk—his own talk of his own trouble—as presently happened.

It should be said here that thirty years of South Africa in its length and breadth had made him a true Colonial in one thing—as in most things else—namely, he had no shyness of speech when at last he did begin, so that I, listening, heard his story as freely told as if I had questioned him on every part of it and had his ready answer. It is true that, with him as with the doctor and Mr. Mansel, I cannot reproduce the exact diction of the story as the words fell upon my ear there in that cool tent. But the matter of it sank so surely into place in my mind that I shall not fail of conveying it to the reader, at least near enough to miss no significance of it, and that is the greater point in a story.

“You see, sir,” he began at length, “it’s me that let the lad come to the war at all; that’s what makes it hit so hard. I had had him with me, learning his trade—waggon-building—down yonder in Grahamstown before the war—for I’d gone down from

Rhodesia to live in a bit of quiet in my old days—and he was just the nicest young lad I ever had in the shop. And when the war came, and I dropped the hammer and joined Brabant's, why, even then the youngster wanted to come, and him no taller than the sledge-hammer, as you may say.

"Then, when I'd done my time in Brabant's, and I'd joined Rostron's instead of going down with the rest of the fellows, well, he begun to write me letters, swearing he'd join the worst regiment in the field if I didn't let him come up to mine, and he'd got a regulation rifle, and already he could beat lots of the fellows back from the front at eight hundred yards. So when the Captain made me take serjeant-major, and gave me a fortnight's furlough to Grahamstown so I could look out a few recruits, why, then there was no holding him.

"I didn't like to bring him, because his mother's got no other son but him ; but he climbed into the train when I thought of coming away, and he swore he'd fight me if I tried to chuck him off, and he'd got on a khaki uniform from somewhere, and it was no use, he said, he'd come up anyhow. And he did look so tall with that khaki on, quite as tall as I was, I thought ; and the tears were shining in his eyes, and the red was flushing in his face, and he was pleading so to get me to let him come. And so I let him.

"Well, I brought him up here with the rest, and we lay in the detail camp in this very town, all amongst the scallawags of half a hundred regiments, while we were waiting for the column to come in so we could join it, and it seemed like he was the brightest and the happiest lad that ever was in those few days. And he'd weary me day and night for tales of the regiment and the squadron and Old Fireproof—you know, sir, that's our name for the Captain—and every night the last word he'd say would be reminding me that he was to come into D Squadron, so as to be with Old Fireproof too.

"And then, sir, you should have seen his misery when he thought he'd disgraced himself for ever, the very day the column was coming in. That was a day ! This blazing fool that's commandant of the town must send out a party to bring in firewood,

and he wouldn't send it out on the side the column would be coming in on, where it would be safer. No, it must go out on the other side; a gang of sick-lame-and-lazy derelicts it was, and naturally the only good man in it paid the price for going with such a crowd.

"I wasn't with it: I was on duty here in the town, or I'd never have let it go near that spot; I know it too well. Neither would I have let the young fellow go out with such a gang if I'd been there. But I wasn't, and so he got himself detailed for the party, and got an old crock of a horse—he'd taken the worst screw of the lot rather than not go—and he was as happy as a bird there, far out in front of the rest, because they lagged and crawled so. They were that sort.

"And then, all of a sudden, he found himself looking down the barrels of about forty rifles, not thirty yards away, and all the round wide world roaring 'Hands up!'

"He must have gone white to the bone as he let his rifle drop. He told me afterwards, the one time he'd ever talk about it, that he felt like his heart, and his blood, and his soul itself, dropped down there with his rifle on the ground. And then they took his belts and his horse and stripped him; stripped him to the naked white of his skin, and sent him shining back across the feldt like a young lost angel. It's a God's-thanks there was no water between that place and Mooiburg here, or he'd have drowned himself for shame.

"He never said a word as he came in alone, for the wood party had bunked back to camp the moment he was taken. The sentry asked him what happened, but he just shook his head. And then I was there, and he saw me, and if a boy's heart could break in his breast his would have broken then. He turned right round, as if he'd walk away out of camp, or anywhere away from my face; but I'd seen the look in his eyes—and—well, I had him up in my arms, just like his mother must have had him when he was little, and I turned again and started for our blankets.

"The fool commandant was fussing up on his horse. 'Hi! here! you there! Stop! What's happened?' But 'Hell!'

says I, and on I went, and laid the lad down on our blankets, and covered him over. And he wasn't crying like a child, but like a grown man, and that was more horrible in him than if he'd been bearded—horrible.

"Well, and I rigged up two blankets for a tent again, to hide him, and the fellows of the A.S.C. sneaked me some clothes for him—they knew what I was feeling, and the lad—and I might have got him another rifle, too, and a bandolier, but he wouldn't have them. 'No, Tom,' says he; 'never no more. Clothes I must have to cover me, but rifles—no. I'm a coward; a coward; and that's done me. No more rifles; I'm a coward.'

"Then some man outside shouted to his chum, 'Yonder comes the column: see the dust!' and there and then I thought the lad would go clean off his mind. 'Can't you send me away somewhere, Tom? Can't you get me on one of those trains to Cape Town before the column comes in? The Captain will be coming over here, and he'll see me. If he does, I tell you, I'll jump right under the wheels of the very next train that passes; I will.'

"If I could have got him to tell me how it happened it might have been better. But he wouldn't: he was disgraced, he said, and that was enough without talking about it. And I knew as strong as the sun that he wasn't, and that whatever it was he'd done it wasn't cowardly. 'Why,' said I, 'it's nothing. Hundreds and hundreds of fellows get captured and come in naked every minute of the day.' But he wouldn't listen.

"'No,' says he. 'Besides, those fellows did some good fighting first; not prisoner the very first time they saw a Boer with a rifle. And anyhow I was never going to be taken prisoner. I was going to keep right close up to Old Fireproof in the charges, when he captures the koppies, so he wouldn't have to keep getting there with only nine or ten, like you say he does. And now——'

"Well, the A.S.C. they brought me some rum, thinking it would stir his heart up like. But that was worse. 'Rum's for men,' he said. 'Cowards shouldn't drink up the men's rum so they'll be short.' I did want to punch his young head for him

then, but you can't when they're like that. So the A.S.C. they nodded to me and left us alone again. They were gentlemen, the A.S.C.

"If ever I was in misery it was then. It got so bad, sitting and hearing him call himself coward and all that, that at last I said, 'Look here, if you say that again, I'll give you the nicest pair of black eyes any man ever had.' And—'Do,' says he. 'Just give 'em me.'

"Then I said something I was sorry for. 'Look here now, if you don't buck up, Charlie, I'll write and tell your mother.'

"Wasn't I sorry! He just gripped hold of my two hands, and—'Don't!' says he. 'Don't, Tom!' in a voice like I've heard actors on the stage. It got hold of me like pincers and tore me. 'All right, chummie, I won't,' I said. 'I won't—only you lie down again now.'

"Well, he did. And then, all in a minute like, just like a little child, he was fast asleep, his forehead on his hands, but his face turned far enough sideways for me to see the wet on his long eyelashes. His father should have been there then, but he was killed up in Rhodesia, in the Shangani fight.

"So while he was asleep I got an M.I. corporal to watch him, and to knock him down with a rifle if he waked up while I was gone, and off I went to see Old Fireproof and tell him all about it. He's the daddy of them all when a man's in a bad mess like that.

"But there was luck for you! While I'd been sitting with the lad, Old Fireproof had been bustled off to Bloemfontein about some ordnance stores, and he'd got on a train and gone, not fifty yards from my eyes, and me not seeing him because of the station buildings between.

"'He'd be back to-morrow,' said Old Rostron. 'To-morrow!' said I, and me standing and thinking there of all the hours between that and to-morrow. And, besides, there was the night. But I know what I did about that night. I just made our blankets down together again, when we'd shifted our kit to the regiment, and that night I handcuffed the young beggar to me. He had to stop.

"Well, next day I watched the trains come in like a dog watching for its master, and when the afternoon passed and dark dropped, and no train brought Old Fireproof, I just turned to on rum. For all the other squadrons had got hold of how young Palliser had been prisoner, and had come in stripped, and now where was Fighting D Squadron, that never had a man taken prisoner? And the old hands of the squadron itself were coming to me and wanting to know how it happened, and him lying there, white and sick under my blankets, with the heart shivering in his breast, till I sat down in front of our little shelter tent and swore I'd shoot the next d——d man that came near. But the squadron was good, it never tried to say that the lad hadn't been posted to D yet. It knew he was D, my own recruit, and it just said—'All right, you fellows: just wait till the next fight. Then you A and B and C men will see the same old thing—Fighting D first, and the rest nowhere.'

"When it had got good and dark, and I knew no more trains could come in that night, and never thought of the armoured train that comes in any time it likes, I turned to the young fellow and made him swear by all the gods in hell that he wouldn't leave that night, and the next thing I knew I was raging drunk, challenging down the other squadrons' lines, kicking their saddles about, and asking if there was half a man in all their lines to just step out and take me on. A squadron-serjeant-major that was, doing that sort of thing across the camp, for the stars and the men to look at. It comes back to me yet sometimes, and I think you'll know what that's like to me, without my trying to use any words about it."

I nodded. I thought of my own weakness, which this grey fighter had seen. "I know what shame is," I said. "I have had it on me."

Quietly we nodded to each other. We understood.

CHAPTER XVI

OF THE SORROW OF THE YOUNG LAD, AND OF HOW THE CAPTAIN
INTERPRETED THINGS TO HIM

THE serjeant-major did not pause long on that point, so sore a point as it might have been with both, but that both had heard the strong tones of the same man, the Captain, saying quietly, "A mistake, so huge seeming at the moment that we can no-way see round it to happiness again, may well prove a thing to thank God for all our lives, if only remembrance go with our feet in future."

So the serjeant-major's voice came forth again in steadfast tones. . . . "Kicking the saddles about, drunk, and challenging three squadrons to find a man to fight me—that was me. And then, out of the dark, and the starlight, and the camp-fires that were in my eyes, came a voice, the Captain's voice, slow and very quiet. 'Is it you—again! I did not think you would ever have broken your word.'

"The sham on me! I wanted to drop—drop down dead for ever—only the good gladness to have him back to set things right made me want to grip his hand off. And while I stood, dumb, he put his hand under my elbow again, as he'd done once before, and he led me away through all the non-coms. the Adjutant had sent to put me under arrest, and I kept the way straight across to my blankets, where the lad was lying inside them—though of course the Captain didn't know that, for he'd just come off the armoured train, and hadn't even been into the mess yet.

"'Now you lie down,' said the Captain, 'and you'll give me

your word that you'll not stir out of your blankets till the morning.' And he was pressing me with his hand to make me lie down.

"But I wouldn't lie down, for I was trying to pick out the best way to begin telling him about the lad, when all of a sudden there was a shuffle inside the shelter-rig, and out and up into the open with us stood the young heart himself, naked again in the starlight as he had been naked in the sunlight of yesterday. I thought—but well, I thought he'd gone mad.

"And he spoke. 'This is me, sir,' he said, and his voice was like a voice that's come on the midnight tide across all the seas of despair—'this is how I came in yesterday, when the Boers finished with me and let me go. They wouldn't shoot me.'

"I had him fast by the wrist before he'd finished, but that was no use. 'No, Tom, you needn't,' he said. 'This is the Captain, I know, and I'm telling him the truth, so you can't hide it, and so he'll know just what I am.'

"I might think he was mad, but Old Fireproof didn't. He always knows the clean heart of it without further words, if it's anything like that. He thinks every man's as fine as himself, and his thought always flies straight on the good line. 'Ah! is it that?' he said, soft and low, as if the lad had been a woman standing in sorrow before him. 'You were taken, were you?' And with the thought of it he spread the cloak from his arm and put it quite round the boy, buttoning it at throat and breast, not so much to warm his body as to warm his heart, and not so much as if to keep the cold from him as to keep the jibes of men from him.

"Then he turned to me. 'Is he—is he a young brother of yours, serjeant-major? I don't think you ever told me that you were married to have a son.'

"'No, sir,' I said; 'but if I ever had a son this would be him to a hair. And his heart's broke because he was captured on a fool of a job this fool Commandant would send them out on.'

"'Ah!' he said again. Sir, you should hear him say that 'Ah!' The fellows know it. 'Ah!' he said, and his two hands

went out, one on the lad's shoulder and one on his arm, and he stepped close up to him, just like his father might have done if he'd been alive. 'Then, 'I think I understand,' the Captain almost whispered, and his heart was in the softness of his voice, till I heard the lad catch his breath as he stood.

"There was a waft of quiet, and then the words came yet again, soft as the fall of dark. 'Yes, I think I understand,' and I knew the little smile was on his face, for all that I couldn't see it in the dark. No man that's ever seen it forgets it, because it's only for a man in sorrow that smile comes out. And then once more, still a third time, the words came out, like an echo for tenderness—'I understand.'

"Quiet came to me then. I knew that by that time the lad would be feeling just what Old Fireproof was—you don't *know* about Old Fireproof, you just feel.

"But the youngster couldn't quite let himself go yet. 'No, sir,' he said; 'you can't understand a coward.'

"'Well,' said the Captain, speaking slow, and like as if it was a thing that just was a bit curious. 'I'm not sure that I do *quite*. It seems so strange a way, just to be eating, and drinking and sleeping, and to have no more of life but just that—and fearing. It is such a poor little lot to have for all the trouble of living, when you are always and all the time afraid unless you're at the left elbow of a policeman. When one thinks of all there is in life, the honour and the content and the quiet, if one is in truth a man, and then tries to think of the poor coward, with no rest and no peace unless life is going along the same smooth track like a tramway line, why, it does seem something hard to understand. It must be a terrible life, poor beggars!'

"That was Old Fireproof again, every word, for he was talking half to himself and thinking as he talked. There the lad had him laid out for him to see, clear through and through, right on his first meeting him, and his eyes must have widened as he stood and listened, because his heart was warming together and swelling into life again inside him. Only he still would have the last, last shadow out.

"'But, sir, I hands'd-up the minute they shouted, and there

was only forty of them. You never did that. I've heard about you. You rode right up to hundreds of them, and while they all had their rifles ready, and were shouting "Hands up!" you were just counting them and looking at the position. And then you just turned round and went back and told the General what was there.'

"The captain nearly laughed. You could hear the smile in his voice. 'Why, of course, that was the very thing I'd been sent out to do. There wasn't time to scout the position, so it had to be done by bald bluff like that. But that was an open-eyed order, obeyed with open eyes, not a surprise thing like yours of yesterday. No, no; you don't know what a coward is, either, boy, or you wouldn't feel like that. A coward wouldn't have stood up and talked as you've just talked. Above all, a coward couldn't have driven Serjeant-major Hughes to break loose as he's done to-night. Did you think of it like that?'

"He had the lad there: he always has pretty well everybody like that, by just making them think another way. But the lad is a stubborn young beggar. 'He ought to have shot me yesterday,' he said.

"'Oh, he'd shoot you quick enough if you were a real coward and in action,' smiled Old Fireproof. 'But now, you get down into the blankets, and we'll hear the whole thing. There's room for me inside, I think.'

"So there we all got down inside the shelter-rig, the three of us lying in the blankets in the dark, the lad in the middle, and me speaking first, telling all about his enlisting. And when I'd told all about that, then the lad told all about the rest, the going out and being captured; every last shameful word as he thought it.

"But when he'd finished, Old Fireproof spoke, and I knew he was smiling and smiling like a father all the while. 'No, no, that is not it at all. You've put it wrong, because you don't quite understand, and you'll be a deal older before you do if I don't tell you now. You see, it's that you'd been so long eating your heart out down yonder in Grahamstown, aching and praying to get to the front, and all the while, day by day, the war was

being finished, as you thought. And the Grahamstown regiments were doing such good work up here, and the young fellows you knew, and that weren't so much older than you, were getting themselves in everybody's mouths; lots of them getting wounded and coming home convalescent, and some of them even getting killed, and then everybody so proud of their being Grahamstown men. And all that time you had to wait and count the days till you'd be old enough to enlist, till at last down came the serjeant-major, and you bullied him, and he persuaded your mother, and up you came.

"Well, and then you heard all these tales of the regiment, and you thought you couldn't afford to lose a minute, or a single chance of showing yourself good enough stuff too, and so you got on to that wood-party, because the Boers might try to capture it.

"That's how you came to get so far ahead of the rest, because they were only hoping to get back safe, while you were hoping for Boers. And when you rode up that little koppie, you weren't thinking of Boers being in so small a place, when there were so much bigger koppies just beyond, and the feldt looked so empty. All your mind was busy hoping that the Boers would come down from those big koppies before you had to go back, and thinking how you just would fight. And then—then, it was forty rifles levelled at you, and one long maniac roar of "Hands up!"—I've heard it—and the thing was done and your rifle dropped before you knew it. And isn't that just the way it was?" ended the Captain, and he put his hand on the lad's shoulder in the dark.

"The lad had to catch a big breath and hold it: everything was so clear and true. 'But isn't that being a coward, sir?' he said.

"Old Fireproof laughed, low and merry in the dark. 'Son, son, that's anything but being a coward. That's really just a young fellow that's learning his lesson. That's one that's never going to go up to a koppie again, no, nor over the plainest, flattest feldt, but he'll be looking for Boers in every yard of the ground. He's going to be looking for every possible place that

a Boer could hide in, and to be studying how he can flush that Boer in time, and deal with him. He'll be expecting a shot at every stride, and thinking of what's the best way in and the best way out of every position he approaches, and what is just the thing to be done if the Boers turn out to be here, or there, or anywhere. And all the time he'll be looking right and left, and behind and before, keeping touch with the rest if he's with a body of men, or, if he's alone, then keeping a plan and a line of country in his head, ready if he should have to run for it to get away with his information.

"And all the time he'll be learning, learning, learning, both from things he's seen a hundred times, and things he never knew existed till then. And that's the man no money can pay for: it's the man the women should pray for, and it most assuredly is the man his officers will work to death—as you'll guess when you come to be a non-com. and begin to look for such men till your heart aches. They're gold, pure gold, such men are."

"I laughed to myself, for I could feel in my heart that the lad was fairly cornered with the wonder of new lights. 'If I could go out with you to-morrow, sir, and do something!' he said. 'Or if I hadn't belonged to your squadron that never had a man captured before! They say I've broken your luck.'

"'My luck!' said Old Fireproof, half snorting. 'I can't get the beggars to thank Christ for that: they keep talking of just *my* luck. It will do them good. We might ha' gone on and piled up the insolence, till some day the whole squadron would be bagged to teach it that it's not a tin god. So now, boy, you give the serjeant-major your word that you'll play the game by him, and to-morrow he's to bring you to me to be my orderly.'

"'I will, sir, I will,' said the lad, so earnestly that you could hear his voice ringing with it.

"And that earnestness touched the Captain in the true spot, as it always does. 'Thank you,' he said, quite as earnestly. 'And good-night,' he went on, getting up to go.

"But I thought he hadn't done: I thought he wouldn't go without saying something more, and something in earnest, and he did. 'Don't trouble: don't fret any more,' he said, and then,

just as he was on turning to go—'Christ be with you,' he ended softly.

"That was him: that was Old Fireproof to the bone. That's the gentleman in him: he's never afraid to let you see inside him: he knows he's a gentleman clean through to his marrow, and so he's never ashamed to speak to us as if we were gentlemen, understanding the same things the same way as himself. That's where he has us: you can't refuse to be a gentleman when you're treated as if you were one—I'm not meaning born with money. And so he went away that night, and left us two lying there in the dark.

"When he was quite gone I spoke to the lad. 'Now what do you think? Didn't I tell you?' said I.

"'No,' says he, 'you didn't. You couldn't—nor anybody else. But you just wait till we march—that's all.'

"And so we went to sleep—no handcuffs that night."

The serjeant-major paused, belike to muse a little, and I, merely to breathe my thoughts, said simply, "He was a brave boy. I am glad it was the Captain that was his officer. So many would have refused to think more of him, and so he might have been lost."

"But, sir," spoke the serjeant-major; "that's only the beginning of the story. Wait till you hear how it went on."

"Ah!" said I, and straightway I fell to pouring fresh coffee for him, and pushing the tobacco nearer to his hand. I was all eagerness to hear "how it went on."

CHAPTER XVII

OF THE HIGH HEART OF THE LAD, WHICH WOULD NOT LET HIM
BEAR HIS SHAME IN EASE, AND OF THE HIGH PLAN OF THE
CAPTAIN TO LEAD HIM TO EASE OF HEART AGAIN

“YOU see, sir,” went on the serjeant-major; “next morning, when I woke up, I saw the lad was almost cheerful, and I began to think the thing was almost done with, as far as he was concerned, except, of course, I’d have to watch him from being too reckless in the next fight. But while he was fetching water for me to wash, one swine of an undesirable in C Squadron—his captain got him sent down as an undesirable the very next day—got jeering the lad again, and the youngster wasn’t man enough yet to hold up against it. He came back as grey and as sick-looking as he well could be, and all my swearing at him didn’t seem to hearten him.

“And while he was like that I was sent for to orderly room tent, about my last night’s break, and when I got back he was worse, for he’d heard all the fellows saying I was bound to be broke, and one or two of the restive sort weren’t too sorry. But I told him that Old Fireproof had got the thing put off for twenty-four hours, and by that time he’d have talked Old Rostron over. I didn’t tell him that I’d begged the Captain to let me revert to the ranks, since I wasn’t fit to be a serjeant-major after last night, because the Captain had just fired me out of the tent at that. He’d got all the dashed troopers he wanted, he said, and I was just trying to shirk out of work. The work had got to be done, and I’d got to do it, and in between I could think over what I’d done, and remember that he’d lay no value on my

promise in future till I'd showed myself man enough to keep straight without giving a promise. Of course he didn't say it like that, but that's what it came to.

"That's the worst of Old Fireproof's way of punishing a man. He makes a man think for himself, and then leaves it so that a man has to keep on thinking, and a man gets that dashed miserable he'd like to get out and get into the thick of a good thick lot, with the bayonet or the butt, till he was flattened out. If he'd broke me that would have squared the bill, and I wouldn't have felt that I owed anything. And the men wouldn't be too easy for me to handle now, because they knew I ought to be broke.

"Well, when the lad heard me say that it was put off for twenty-four hours he looked at me, and took a big breath and said nothing, and I thought that he'd just taken hope that it would come out all right. And he didn't say much while he straightened up the kit, and he didn't say much while I took him over to the captain's Cape cart and left him there as orderly, and right enough I thought he'd buck up all right just through his youth, alone.

"But that afternoon I got the eye-opener. I had to find the Captain, for him to sign some papers, and there I found the two of them down in the spruit, Old Fireproof making mud-pies, as he called it, and the young fellow looking on with all his eyes, and all his soul as well.

"The Captain looked up at me. 'Only some signatures, sir. They can wait,' said I; and he went on with his game. And I looked, too, and I listened, and there he was, laying out that whole piece of country where the lad had been captured, building it up and laying it out with the mud and the sand of the spruit.

"'I'm showing him the truth,' said Old Fireproof. 'He thinks the place he was captured in was just a koppie in the feldt. I'm showing him that it's only part of a deal more koppies and a deal more feldt. I'm showing him that God's laws made all the countries out of smaller pieces of country, if you catch my meaning, and that when you come to any particular

spot it's always part of one of those pieces of country, and that you've got to look at the whole piece first, and then at the parts of it. He's seeing now that his koppie and his flat were only parts of the whole Schoonfontein country, and he's dimly beginning to see why men, doing anything of war in that piece of country, must make certain moves and do certain things and no others, all because the Schoonfontein country was built a certain way.' That's Old Fireproof all over: he always goes right down to the foundations of things, and makes you see facts as clear as a mountain, building them up in your mind.

"And he was saying to the lad: 'Now, suppose you were a Boer commandant, and had a little commando in that Schoonfontein country, and your business was to watch the British here in Mooiburg, to cut off everything you could in the way of cattle or men, and generally to see that they didn't stick their noses outside their lines except in force—now, what would be the way you'd do that?'

"The lad looked straight at him, with his eyes wide open at such a simple question. 'Why, sir, I'd first set a look-out post on this highest koppie here,' and he touched the model of the Spitz Kop that stands up over all else of that country. Then I'd keep all the men in any of these kloofs and little places where the feed was good for the horses, and where they'd be well hidden. And after that, whenever the look-out reported anything coming that I was strong enough to take on, why, I'd gather the men and push forward to the best place farthest in front—to this koppie here:' and then he stopped, and went as red as fire, for the koppie he'd put his finger on was the very same koppie he'd been captured on.

"'Ah! do you see now?' spoke Old Fireproof, smiling, and keeping on smiling merrily all the while, till the lad was forced to smile too. 'Now do you see how easy—how wonderfully, shamefully, marvellously easy—war is, if you only think a bit, and keep on thinking, and still thinking, and always act on your thinking? It's because people will keep on imagining that war is just shooting and fighting and war correspondents, that things get into such a mess. War, real war, is studying first, studying

second, studying last and all the time : but studying on the right lines and then acting according to your conclusions. Do that, and then the fighting comes in its right and proper place, and so can be handled as it ought to be—that's war, when real soldiers make war ; not amateurs or criminal fools.'

"The lad looked fairly dazed, and his eyes began to spread a bit, as if he was watching the dawn sweep the night off a wide piece of country in his front. And he was, too, for he'd been reading the papers so much about war, and reading books so much about V.C.'s and what-nots, that it fairly left him stranded to hear how clear and strong the right thing was, underneath all that top stuff.

" 'And now,' Old Fireproof went on, 'supposing I sent you out, after this, in front of another wood party, of your own squadron, how would you go about that piece of country this time?'

"The lad answered straight off like reading. 'I'd go this way,' he said, drawing the line with his finger. 'I'd go round there till I could see if there was any sign of horses or men or anything in that koppie. Then, if that was clear, I'd draw across here till I could look in there, from out here. And then I'd stop, because the wood party wouldn't be coming out any farther, and if the Boers came out at all they'd have to come just my way and so show themselves to me.'

"The Captain looked up at me and smiled. 'Well, serjeant-major, what price this lad for next-for-corporal, as soon as he's grown a bit more moustache?'

"I laughed, and the lad laughed a bit, too, shy-like ; and the Captain went on. 'But now, at night—supposing you were the Boer Commandant again ; how would you go on at night, remembering that the Khakis—the British—might pop out any night from here and try to snap you at dawn?'

" 'Well, sir, of course I'd have to draw back at night as far as was not too far. I wouldn't camp at Schoonfontein farm there, because that's where the Khakis would naturally look for me. Nor I wouldn't go into these three kloofs, nor on this Krantz Kop, because they are bad to get away from if you're attacked

all round by a big force. I'd either go right out into the flat feldt, where there's nothing to guide the Khakis, or I'd get on one of these easy ridges where I could mount and go if we had to, and where it's not easy to be surrounded.'

"The Captain nodded to him. 'You've hit it to a hair. You see, now you know exactly what Commandant Ferreira and his Burghers are doing, every day and every night. Why, it would be quite easy, wouldn't it, for one of our Kaffirs to go out there afoot in the night, and get into the koppies and hide snug somewhere, and watch the Boers all day?'

"'It would,' said the lad, his face quickening.

"'And if he watched them close, and saw where they drew to sleep, why, it would be the simplest thing in the world for him to steal down on them in the dark, and bring away a rifle and a bandolier and a horse, for yours, wouldn't it?'

"'I can,' said the lad. And as soon as he said it I looked at Old Fireproof, but he wouldn't look at me. I could see at last what he'd been after all the time, and now he'd done it. But, but—the fear was knocking at my ribs.

"'Well,' said he to the lad, 'there's the Schoonfontein county in model, if you want to study it. I must go over now with the serjeant-major about the papers.'

"And the lad wouldn't look at me either, and so we two went and left him, staring and thinking.

"'But, sir——' I said to the Captain as soon as we got away a bit.

"'No, serjeant-major; I'm afraid it's no use talking. I've tried that, and it's not enough. The thing can't be helped. You've got to let him go through with it; there is no other way. One thing—when he comes back with the rifle the squadron will be the stronger by another *man*; you know what I mean.'

"I did know, only I knew something else. 'But, sir, if he's killed?' I said, and I couldn't say another word.

"'Well, he'll have been killed trying, and that's the only thing that matters: if he's killed he'll know that at once. That's the best of death, as soon as one is killed one will see the real things from the trumpery things.'—Sir, I think sometimes

that Old Fireproof would like to be killed, just so as to get to know for himself.

"But I was thinking of the lad's mother and sisters, that looked at me with such eyes when I let him come, only I couldn't get the right words to start talking with. Old Fireproof must have guessed it, though, for he went on—'As to his mother and sisters—remember, he stands just as liable to be killed within the fifth mile of the next trek as he does to-night. Don't forget that Forrest had his neck broken by a box of biscuits falling on him off a waggon, the last time we were in this very camp. And which would his people prefer—have him dead bravely, or living in misery?'

"'Neither, sir,' I said. And he smiled.

"Well, just as we were tying up the horses for the evening feed, back came the young fellow, with a smile on his face that I couldn't stand at all, because I knew there'd be no use talking to him either; any more than it had been to Old Fireproof; with that look on him. And he'd hardly a word to say, though he took a good meal with me; for I'd kept out of the sergeant's mess till my case should be tried. Then he put six biscuits in his pockets, and filled my water-bottle and put it on, and sat down to wait for dark. 'You'll take my rifle and bandolier, I suppose?' said I.

"'No,' said he; 'no rifle till I get one from them. Besides, I've got this,' and he showed me a revolver; Old Fireproof's revolver that he seldom carries himself. 'And this, too,' he went on, and I knew in a wink what that was: it was a 'sand-bag,' a thing that thieves use in America to knock a man down to rob him. I don't know who gave him that, though like as not it was the Captain. 'Anything's a good weapon if a good man's using it,' I heard him say once, 'and some things are a lot better for certain work.'

"After that I could see it would be no use to argue with the lad. So I started to tell him he must do this and do that, and be sure of this and t'other. 'Oh,' he said, 'the Captain's been telling me, these three hours past, just what to do, no matter what they do, and things they'd never think of. And yet he

says it's sure to be something quite simple that'll happen, if it does happen, and something just as simple that'll pull me through. By Jove! what he does know about everything! You fellows don't half know him; not half.'

" 'Don't we?' said I. 'We know one thing. We know that if he had us out, and hell was in front of him, and he thought that was the place we ought to camp, he'd take us in and clear it out, and say, "Pitch the lines here now, and turn the horses out that way to graze." And there we'd camp, and there the horses would graze on the feldt of hell, and the devil and all his commando would have to lie out on the koppies and watch us, and catch colds, till we trekked again and left the place to them once more. Don't we know! Don't think you're the only man he's set on his feet again. Some of us were worse than you, because they hadn't a backbone in them till he put one in. And yet we're old Fighting D and all; don't forget.'

" 'And I'll be D, too, when I come back,' he said. Then it was dark, and he got up. 'Good-bye, Tom,' he said.

" 'I'll good-bye you in a minute,' said I. 'I'll see you out of camp, at any rate.' So up I got, and we started.

" 'Not that way; this way,' he said, and he began to lay off the reasons for it, three deep, till I could see Old Fireproof had gone over the whole thing with him, right from leaving the squadron lines. That helped me a lot, and as we went I prayed and I cursed the lad to remember and do just what the Captain had told him.

" 'Do you know what's the chief thing he told me?' answered the lad.

" 'His motto, I'll bet,' said I. 'Better death than fear.'

" 'Well, yes, that too. But the chief thing he said was that I must think all the time, and every time, about the best way of the work I was doing. Then I'd never be taken by surprise; and it's surprise that does one in.'

" 'That's it,' said I. 'Good-night, now. But if you come back killed—just you dare to, that's all!' And I stopped, as if I didn't know what I wouldn't do to him if he did.

"And that made him laugh, which was what I wanted, just

to ease the strain on him like, for he'd screwed himself up a bit too tight. And so he went on into the dark."

The serjeant-major broke off his tale for a breath, but I had no word of comment which I dared speak aloud. It seemed to me so desperate an adventure to which to lead any young lad, that my conscience would still shake its head at all my urgings in favour of the Captain, where I tried to argue that he was a man more able to judge what was right and truly best in such a matter than I was. A lad in any case, my conscience spoke back, is none too cautious, if he be brave at all. How much less than cautious, then, would this fine-spirited lad be, goaded as he was by the vividly imagined shame of his surrender of two days before? Was the Captain not too extreme? In the mercilessness of his own bravery was he not become merciless to the lad?

I did not know: I could not decide; nor dare I ask the serjeant-major to decide for me. I could only wait eagerly for the rest of the story to resolve my doubts.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LUCK OF THE SCOUT, AND THE PITY OF CHRIST

THE serjeant-major paused only long enough to take a drink of coffee, and then continued the story, his eyes fixed on the blank side of the tent, as if the whole scene he was recounting were livingly pictured there. "I went back to the lines, and I wanted to turn to on rum, but I wouldn't. And I went back to my blankets and wanted to sleep, but I couldn't. And while I was lying there like that, along came Old Fireproof, and crawled in under, and lay down there with me in the dark, and began to talk. There's nothing that you read in these books they keep printing that seems worth reading after that. He was alive.

"After awhile, too, he began to buck me up with arguments. I remember one of them specially, because it was so simple and so true. 'You know quite well,' he said, 'that we ourselves often expect to be rushed at night. Well, and how often you've got up out of your blankets at night, for one reason or another, and stalked right across the camp, through the other units, and yet—has any man ever stuck his head out of the blankets to challenge you, or even to curse you for walking about near his kit?'

"It was true, no man had, and of course he didn't mean inner sentries, like horse guards and that sort of thing, because the Boers don't set them. And when I said so he went on, 'Yes, I've always found it particularly safe to knock about inside the enemy's lines at night, after a war gets a bit old, providing you know a few simple words and answers and habits of theirs,

especially some very common name to give yourself if some beggar does ask, Who's you? And the lad, you know, is as much at home as a Boer as they are themselves.'

"And that way he went on, argument after argument, till he'd quite heartened me up by the time he stood up to go. Then he said, 'Remember, too, that officially the lad is gone scouting, alone, to look up Commandant Ferreira's little lot. Therefore, for this one occasion the lad is a scout, and so the old motto must cover and keep him: you know it—The Luck of the Scout and the Pity of Christ. Good-night, then, Serjeant-major.' That was him again; he'll always end on a note like that. He cheers one so.

"Well, and after he was gone I lay there thinking about the lad out yonder, plodding, plodding, plodding across the feldt, and every time now when I think of myself lying there I seem to be looking out of the blankets and seeing him yonder, out through the dark, miles out, miles out.

"He kept his course by the stars at first; not the regular Southern Cross, but the one the Captain always calls the Scout's Cross. And it is a real, long, beautiful cross, and it swings right over, so that you can tell the time as well as the direction by it. Then he got the black lines of the koppies ahead, and he steered on by them.

"At the farthest it wasn't more than seven miles to go, but seven miles of ant-hills and ant-bear holes, and sluits and spruits and stones and dongas, and all in the dark—well, it seems more like seventy miles before you've finished it afoot. Especially the ant-heaps, for there's some of them you can't distinguish in the dark and keep your direction too, and you do come such crashing smashes over them.

"Then he came to the koppies, and marked for the wide neck by the old Kaffir kraals that he'd have to pass, and so he was fairly into Ferreira's stamping-ground at last. And into the koppies he got, and up and down he went, and round and round, and on and on, till he seemed to be wandering on and wandering on, world without end forever and ever amen, and he thought the Burghers must surely have left that country altogether. And

then, all of a sudden, he nearly fell against two knee-haltered horses—he'd come right on the commando's horses: he was there: and he dropped down, flat down, to think and to look about him.

"Lying flat like that, and being at the foot of a bit of a slope, he had the horses between him and the sky-line, and he saw the whole place was scattered with horses, nearly every one knee-haltered, and in a minute or two he made up his mind what to do first. The thing to do first was to catch a horse and tie it up to a bush ready, on the off chance that he might need it. And so he did it, but when he'd caught one he found he'd caught two, because the only one he could catch without making a noise had a chum, and the chum would follow, so he tied him up too.

"Then he went on to his left, keeping along the foot of the slope, and stopping every two or three strides to stoop and look, and at last he saw what he knew must be a Cape cart, and he thought 'Well, here they are then; now for it.'

"At the same time he knew that, being Boers and being so many of them, they wouldn't be sleeping all in lines like our fellows. He knew they'd be in little lots, two or four or six or a dozen, all over the shop, wherever there were snug places or safe places, and that makes it a deal harder to go about amongst them, as the Captain says.

"The lad looked and looked and thought and wondered. For all he knew, there might be some of them lying between him and the cart, or there might even be some behind him already. He didn't know: the one thing he did know was that he was fairly in for it, and he dropped down and began to crawl on hands and knees towards the cart. And his heart began to flap like a loose waggon sheet in a wind.

"Nearer he got, and nearer still, with his heart hitting him right up in his throat at times, till he'd have to check a bit and fair gulp it back again, and at last he'd got so close he could see there was nobody sleeping alongside the cart, only there was a blank bundle of something underneath it. And then he remembered that was quite right, for the Boers themselves wouldn't lie

alongside such a mark as a cart; there'd only be the Kaffir driver with it, and he'd sleep under it, and that's what the black bundle must be—the Kaffir in his old blankets.

“Then a thought came to him that wouldn't leave him, but kept heading his mind off whichever way it tried to turn. This Kaffir would know where they all slept, and where Commandant Ferreira himself was lying, and it was Ferreira that took his rifle when he was captured, because it was a new one, and shot so straight when he tried it at the wood-party behind. If he could only find where Ferreira was lying, then he might get his own rifle back, with the number on it for inspection, and then any bandolier would do. Besides, it would be safer doing that, because Ferreira, being Commandant, would be certain to be sleeping alone a little way apart, for dignity, or with only one or two with him. The lad was remembering everything he'd been told by the Captain.

“He tried to think some other thing, but this thing wouldn't let him. And then—he hadn't decided to do it, but he found he'd gone on crawling up to the cart; he found he'd done it; he was at the cart, and he looked which end the Kaffir's head was, and he remembered the revolver and pulled it out, drew back the blanket, and clapped the muzzle to the black cheek underneath.—‘*Gelbooi! Gelbooi!*’ he whispered, guessing at a name. ‘*Gelbooi! Stell yeh!*’ That would make the Kaffir think him one of the commando, and anyhow a Kaffir's slow to waken when he's sleeping safe inside a lot of white men. The Kaffir stirred; ‘Yah baas,’ he whispered back at last.

“Then the lad shifted the muzzle to right between the Kaffir's eyes, and pressed till he felt the bone beneath the flesh. ‘You feel this pistol?’ he said in the Taal. ‘You know it's loaded?’

“‘Yah baas,’ whispered the Kaffir.

“‘Well, if you tell me what I ask I won't shoot you. If you don't, I will shoot you—dead. You understand?’

“Yah baas,’ again.

“‘Then where sleeps Commandant Ferreira?’

“The Kaffir thought a minute, and the lad gave the muzzle a

press. 'There, by that wild olive-bush,' whispered the Kaffir, pointing.

"You are certain he's there?" whispered the lad, pressing the pistol again.

"I carried his kaross and blanket there,' whispered the Kaffir. 'I saw him lie down in them.'

"How many sleep by him?"

"Nobody close by the edge of his kaross, but three stark carls lie just the other side the bush, and nine or ten by an old kraal a little way to the right.'

"That was what the lad wanted, but now, what was he to do with the Kaffir while he was after Ferreira? He thought again and then he spoke. 'You've heard what big wages the Khakis pay you yellow boys: four and five pounds a month?'

"Yah baas.'

"Would you like to come and get that pay?"

"Yah baas.'

"All right. Now you get out, and stand up, and walk in front of me, out of the camp. And I'll have the pistol at your back, between your shoulder blades. And if you make the least little noise of any sort, I'll shoot you dead. You understand?"

"Yah baas,' and the Kaffir crawled out and stood up.

"But the lad had been thinking some more. Now he'd got the Kaffir he wanted something else. He'd lost a saddle as well as a horse when Ferreira got him. Ferreira's saddle might be here by this cart; at any rate he'd try for it. 'Take the Commandant's saddle for me, and another good one for yourself,' he said; 'and bring that bundle of riems as well.'

"The guess was right: the Commandant's saddle was here, for the Kaffir just stepped over and clapped hold of one lying by itself. And as soon as he'd laid it on another, and picked both up, and had the bundle of riems on his arm too, the lad added another order—'Now walk out the straightest line for Mooiburg.' The Kaffir walked.

"The lad did that so that he'd know what line to take in going back, for he was afraid he'd lost the line a bit in his wandering.

But it seemed that the line he'd come in on was nearly the exact line back, for when they'd gone on three or four hundred yards, as he thought, he saw the horses he'd tied up, and they were only a little to the right. 'Keep on to those two horses, and saddle and bridle them—my saddle on the grey, yours on the brown,' he ordered. And the Kaffir obeyed.

" 'Now put your two hands behind your neck,' said the lad, and as soon as the Kaffir did it, he slipped the noose of one of the riems over the wrists and had them fast. 'Lie down here by this bush,' he said.

"The Kaffir lay down, and the lad fastened the end of the riem to the stem of the bush, drawing the hands well up above the Kaffir's head. Then, with another riem, he tied the Kaffir's feet and stretched them to another bush, and made them fast.

Now,' he said ; 'I'm going back to the Commandant, and you are stopping here, tied up. And if you make any noise, or if they see me in the laager, then I shall run back this way and kill you before I mount and go. You understand now ?'

" 'Yah baas, but I shan't make a noise. You ought not to kill me if they see you and I'm here,' said the Kaffir.

" 'But I will, for they won't see me if you've told me the truth,' said the lad. 'Are you sure the Commandant is under the wild olive bush ? You know what will happen if you've lied to me,' he went on, for he knew the Kaffir was pretty sure to have lied to him in some part, while he was still near the Boers.

" 'He's there, baas,' said the Kaffir, 'but don't you go straight up from the cart to the wild olive. Go past the cart till you come to a thorn-tree. Then turn and go straight up for the bush ; it will be all soft grass under your feet that way.'

"The lad stooped and clapped the pistol to the black head again. 'And if I'd gone the other way ; the way you showed me when you were under the cart ; what would have been under my feet that way ?'

"The Kaffir kept silent, and the lad felt him shiver under the muzzle. He lifted the pistol. 'Tell me the truth,' he said,

speaking kindly. 'What would have been under my feet that way?'

" 'Twelve men, lying in a row, baas,' said the Kaffir quietly.

" 'Ah, I thought there was something like that,' said the lad. 'And how many men are there here altogether?'

" 'About a hundred, baas, but most of them are sleeping along a ledge over there to the left.'

"The lad knows Kaffirs from the time he was born; he knows their voices. He knew by the voice that this was the truth at last, and so he started back. If he had to run for it now he had horses at any rate, one for himself and one for the Kaffir to guide him on, though he didn't intend to turn back till he'd done the real work—got his rifle from Ferreira.

"Well, with doing all this business of the horses and the Kaffir, he'd got quite bold and quiet again, and his heart was warm and his hands not trembling. But when he'd passed the cart, and had stolen on to the thorn-tree, his throat began to have a cold lump in it, and after he'd turned and was going up towards the olive-bush—well, he couldn't help it; it wasn't sixty yards altogether, but half-way up he had to lie right down, and press his chest to the ground, and wait and press till he could stop his heart galloping and flickering and hurting him. And all the time he was watching himself, and not letting his mind think of turning back, or of anything but the work itself. Twice, as he lay, he said Old Fireproof's motto over to himself: 'Better death than Fear: Better death than Fear'—something like that does help a young fellow sometimes.

"Well, he wanted to keep on lying there, because every time when he'd lift up to start, his heart would begin again, till at last he got that disgusted he just stood right up and stalked straight on—the best thing he could have done, too, says the Captain, because he was wearing feldtschoen, and they make so very little noise on the grass. And then he was by the bush, and there lay one man sleeping, under a white sheepskin comberss, plain enough to be made out in the starlit dark.

"Softly as a cat the lad knelt down beside the man, except that his breath would come in such sobs and starts that he felt

sure the man must hear it and jump up. And that idea got such a hold on him that he whipped out his sandbag and held it ready to strike at the head the minute the man should move.

"Quite a while he knelt like that, looking at the side of the man's head showing above the top edge of the combers as he lay, looking and looking and not able to shift his eyes, nor able to think of anything but to strike that head the minute it should stir. And you know what happens so often, that when you're looking so hard at somebody, they turn round and look at you, or they waken if they're sleeping. Ferreira wakened.

"He didn't shout: he just lifted and grabbed for his rifle, so that the sandbag hit him far back on the back of the head, but only half a blow, because the lad was so shivery, and his breath was catching and his heart plunging, till he thought the sandbag was caught in the air someway and would never come down. But it was enough, for the minute he felt that he'd struck once he struck again like lightning, and Ferreira fell back sideways, quite settled for one while. And there was no sound—a sandbag makes no sound.

"As soon as it was done, and his hand on the rifle, his own rifle, again, with a man of the enemy lying there, conquered by him, the lad's heart just swung out of him, like an eagle off a cliff, for gladness. He seemed to be not fearing about the rest, now he'd stiffened their leader. He picked up the two full bandoliers that were lying there, and swung them across his chest as if the clash might waken every Boer there if it liked. He seized the rifle ready in his hands, and stood and looked round in the dark, as if he was looking for some man to come on, so he could shoot him. And then—then he suddenly slipped his arm through the sling of the rifle; for the sling was on it still; and he knelt down and got hold of Ferreira as he lay. Another thought had got hold of him, one he didn't try to shake off: he was going to take Ferreira prisoner.

"Ferreira wasn't one of these big Boer men. He was one of the chunky, little, grey-eyed sort, and the lad was very strong for such a slim youngster as he was. The first part of the way,

too, was downhill over the smooth grass, and if he could once slide him down over that, till he was far enough from the rest, then he'd wait till Ferreira came round from the blow, and then deal with him as he'd done with the Kaffir, the pistol to his temple and the order in his ear to stand up and march out, without a whisper or a noise.

"Downhill, then, over the smooth grass the lad began to drag his captive. Slow he had to go, and smooth as mortal man could manage it he slid the weight along ; but he thought the grass made such a crackling and rustling, in spite of all he could do, that it must be like rifles in the ear of every man within a mile. And his heart began to quaver and to flutter in the same way as before, because this was a fresh job, and it might finish him, when all the time he'd really finished the thing he came out to do, which was to get a horse and rifle for his own.

"But he wanted that prisoner for proof to the regiment that he'd really been inside the laager for his rifle, and so he wouldn't let go, though half-way down his breath came so hard that he stopped and lay flat again for a minute, to quiet himself once more.

"That was a good thing for him, because he'd hardly done it, and was looking back up towards the olive-bush against the soft grey sky, when one of the three that were sleeping the other side the bush got up and stepped out of his blanket, and began to look downhill ; straight at him, as the lad thought. He made sure he was done for then—and then he didn't think any more, but softly pulled his revolver and waited, for the tall man began to stride downhill in his feldtschoen, this way.

"The lad's heart had shut stiff as steel inside him, and as cruel ; that cruelty that comes to us all, once at least, in a touch-and-go moment like that. He'd kill this tall man, anyhow—and Ferreira too, if he stirred—before he tried to run for his horse.

"But then it struck him that the man wasn't coming quite straight at him. He was heading a little to one side ; a line that would pass him. Perhaps he was only going to have a look round at the horses, as men sometimes do in the night.

Better for him if he was—and he was, for he passed within ten paces of the two lying there, and he never saw them.

“The lad thought that was strange, very strange, till he remembered that the man was only plain to him from the first because he showed against the grey sky-line, while the man, coming down hill as he was, had only the black earth in front of his eyes, and so couldn’t see anything that wasn’t just under his feet, as you may say—unless, of course, he should happen to stoop and look back from farther down the hill. But he passed, and disappeared in the thick dark, and he never looked back—at least, he made no noise that the lad heard. He must have been going to look round the horses, said the lad to himself.

“Safe again, it seemed as if that escape threw the young fellow head first into confidence, and he just slapped hold of Ferreira under the armpits and dragged him straight off down the slope. And he said that dragging him like that didn’t make half the noise the slow way did. Then, just before he got to the thorn-tree, where he’d have had to stop and wait anyhow, Ferreira groaned a bit.

“The lad laid him down flat and knelt beside him, with his pistol in one hand, and the other hand open, ready to clap over Ferreira’s mouth if he should groan again. But he didn’t groan: he began to sit up and put his hand to the back of his neck.

“There is one thing about a sandbag—it does do its work. You may hit a man so hard with it that he’ll just breathe on for hours and then slip out of life without ever knowing what sent him. And if you hit him not so hard, so that he comes round in ten or twenty minutes, he’ll still be dazed and thick-headed for hours after. And that’s the way it was with Ferreira: he came to himself, but he did mumble so thick and low, like a drunken man just on the touch of dropping asleep; and he was so like a mesmerised man all over, that the lad took a flash of thought to handle him just as if he was a drunken man. He helped him to his feet. ‘Come on, Commandant,’ he said. ‘I’ll help you along till you get there.’

"And Ferreira let him take his arm and lead him along like a child.

"So the lad thought he'd done his work now, and that there was nothing more to do but to mount his prisoner and get away back to camp. And he was so full of thinking what Old Fireproof would say to him about it all, instead of remembering to think only of the work till he was abso-bally-lutely finished, that he nearly lost all.

"He'd nearly got back to where he'd left the Kaffir tied fast, but his wits were so wandering and sky-scraping, with the luck he'd had, that he found himself following the straight line to Mooiburg instead of to the two horses, and when he looked round him, here was the long-legged Burgher again, just in front, where there was a bit of sky-line to show him, and he was crossing out of the ruck of the horses to have a look at the two others he'd seen; the two tied to the bushes. Another minute and he'd see the saddles on them, then he'd see the Kaffir, and then it would be all up.

"The lad's heart just filled like a balloon inside him and stuck to his ribs all round. He saw the man stop, stoop, look, and then turn to snap an eye right and left and every way, to see if any riders were near. He didn't speak to the Kaffir till he'd done that, which showed him a good man at the game, and what he saw was enough for him. Quick as a wink the lad saw him lift his rifle to his hip, and—'Wie kom daar?' came the challenge, sharp and quick, but in that low tone a man always uses in the dark when he's suspicious.

"The first word the lad tried to speak he couldn't, but only a little sigh like a baby in its sleep. Then he was just going to say 'Ferreira,' when a thought struck him. 'Commandant,' he said to Ferreira, loud enough for the other burgher to hear him, 'here is a kerel wants to know who you are.' Of course he spoke in the Taal.

"'Tell him Commandant Ferreira then,' answered the prisoner, loud enough, too, for the long-legged man to hear him. And he spoke clear, because the question had stirred the haze in his mind.

"The one that heard—the long-legged one—kept his rifle at the hip and strode forward towards them, his face well to the front till he could almost stick it into Ferreira's. And then he knew the Commandant, and he lifted his rifle muzzle just out of line and spoke. 'Allemachtig! Commandant! I was near——'

"The rest was jerked short off, for the lad had stuck his revolver jammed tight against the bottom of the man's breast-bone. 'Quiet, you! And hands up!—or I kill you!'

"I suppose the burgher was too savage a man to control himself. He couldn't have done what he did if he wasn't, for he tried to get his muzzle down to shoot. The lad had to fire, and the pistol kicked like a mule, he'd pressed it so close to the man's body. It must have blown the heart out of him, and the shot seemed to ring for miles.

"As the man fell, the lad caught Ferreira forward with a run till they were at the horses. Out he whipped his knife and with two strokes he cut the Kaffir free. Up jumped the Kaffir: 'Baas, that was my baas you killed,' he said. 'Let me come with you, or they'll kill me for it.'

"That was just what the lad wanted. He knew the burghers behind would be all on the stretch, eyes and ears, and some would dart for the olive bush and find their Commandant gone. And some would lie close with their rifles ready, but some would run to drive in the horses. And Ferreira was rousing. 'All right,' said the lad; 'help me up with this baas on this horse.' Jove! the Kaffir nearly did it himself.

"With a riem the lad tied the prisoner's feet under the girths; quick and rough, but good enough; and threw the reins to the Kaffir. 'Lead the way to Mooiburg,' he ordered him.

"The Kaffir started with a run, while the lad darted back the dozen steps for the dead man's rifle. His heart was beating fast enough now, but he never thought of that as he snatched up the rifle, for he saw the horses beginning to lunge here and there, being knee-haltered, and shadowy devils were chasing them as he looked against the sky-line. And a devil woke up

in him, and he just turned loose with one rifle after another, emptying both magazines along and among the horses and the men chasing them.

"The men vanished; some of the horses reared and jerked on the knee halters; some ran. Then the lad turned to run too, for his horse, and suddenly found the air full of bullets, and the flashes of the rifles were not two hundred yards from him, right in the line for Mooiburg.

"He didn't stop to count them or to think who it was, or what had become of Ferreira. He just ran the swifter, and jumped on his horse, and smacked both heels in to make him gallop in the dark. And that's when he looked again at the flashes, to see which way to go round them, and there he saw other cross flashes from the right, almost on top of the first flashes, and seeming to be shooting right into them, and the first flashes stopped in a flash, and he heard men running away from there.

"And while he checked for a breath and wondered what that meant, here came the Kaffir back to him, leading Ferreira. 'Baas,' he said, 'that was the brandwacht (picket). I thought you and your men had captured that first of all, or I'd have told you about it. Is that your men that drove it off?'

"'I have no men,' said the lad. 'It must be another party of Burghers running down and firing into the brandwacht by mistake. Come on now: lead some way to Mooiburg, or you're done for.'

"'This way, then; we'll have to go round a bit,' said the Kaffir, and he started off with a run again, the lad prodding Ferreira's horse to the run too with one of the rifles.

"They ran against no men. The Kaffir knew just how near he felt to death, and he picked his way over the grass that made no noise underfoot, and by the ways that were easiest, till they'd drawn clear of the thick koppies again and were out in the open feldt. Then they slowed down: they were safe at last, in the flat and in the dark, and there was nothing more needed but to go steady now to camp.

"Proud! He was proud right down to his toes as he looked at his prisoner, and prouder still when he thought of the big tall man lying dead behind. He'd killed one of the enemy, the same as any other fellow; only somehow he couldn't feel quite easy about that, because he wished it hadn't had to be done just like that. And he's uneasy yet, and he'll continue uneasy till he's old enough to see that a thing that happens without one's will isn't a root matter really. It's the intention that sends the soul to hell-fire—if that's not a thing one ought not to say in front of a chaplain," broke off the serjeant-major deprecatingly.

"Why," I said, "that is the very thing Christ said Himself so long and long ago, by the shores of Galilee. What ye do in your hearts, by that shall ye be weighed—but I'll get you the exact words before you go."

"Thank you, sir," he said, and then returned to his story, which I saw well was not done yet.

CHAPTER XIX

OF THE LAD WHO CAME BACK TO CAMP A MAN, AND OF THE
CAPTAIN'S PART IN THE MAKING OF THAT MAN

“WELL, in the morning early, as soon as it was day, I was up and was beginning to do this and that, longing for some sign of the lad coming back, for I hoped he'd do the job in one night—as he had done, though I didn't know it—and would be here as fast as he could come. And because he didn't come in the first ten minutes I wandered off to the Captain's tent, hoping he'd be up, because he'd be sure to quiet me with his first two dozen words.

“But he wasn't up, and the funny thing was that his brown horse, that he likes so well for night work, was having saddle-marks groomed off him by his Kaffir groom, and the two Mauser pistols of two of the Lieutenants were being cleaned by his other Kaffir. And he himself was sleeping, said the Kaffir; and he hadn't had coffee yet.

“That was all very funny, but I walked off and said nothing, and, as a matter-of-fact, I was too sick and miserable about the lad to think the thing out, or else I might have felt different. As it was, I was nearer to being savage with the Captain than I ever was before or since. I kept saying to myself that he'd sent the lad out just as if the lad ought to be as good as himself.

“Well, and then the sun shot up, and I looked across the feldt, and away yonder I saw two riders coming, with one man afoot. But I was looking for the lad alone—and afoot—not three people, and so I went about, dumb and sullen, till all

of a sudden every man in the squadron-lines seemed to look up at something.

"That stirred me ; I looked up, too, and there was the lad—the lad and his prisoner, crossing the end of the lines. There he was, and the sun was in his face, that was white with pride, and white and gold all his face was gleaming, for every downy hair on lip and cheek and chin, where his beard will be some day, was catching the sun, and shone like gossamer of gold laid on the skin beneath. His blue eyes were quiet and shining, too ; sir, he was all a young angel to look at as he rode, going so slow and so steady across to the Captain's tent.

"The thankfulness was coming out of me in wide curses, all so slow and quiet, as I strode over and caught his rein, and looked him between the two eyes, to see what that night had done for him. But he was too young yet for it to show its marks all at once. Besides, he was my old apprentice, and a bit cheeky still in his heart. 'It's my own rifle back again, Tom,' he said. 'My number's on it. And this is Commandant Ferreira—I brought him in for the Intelligence people to pump him.'

"'You young skellum,' I said. And then I didn't say a word more. Just as he was I took his rein and led his horse along, all the squadron with us, till we came to the Captain's tent.

"Old Fireproof came out as if he'd been waiting, boots, spurs, and leggings shining smart as paint, but his face and his eyes were the face and eyes of a man that's ridden all night, though I didn't think to wonder about that just then. I was only thinking of this other thing as I halted in front of him, and behind me all the squadron standing, crowding in its shirt-sleeves. 'Sir,' I said to the Captain ; 'here he is !'

"In one stride Old Fireproof came near, and he laid his hand on the lad's rifle-hand and looked him in the face. 'Sir,' spoke the youngster, a little slow ; 'it is my own rifle again. And this is Commandant Ferreira that I've taken, and he needs a doctor, because the sandbag hurt him.'

"In that breath Old Fireproof's face shone with the smile that comes when he sees there's a chance to charge in battle. His big eyes widened and he looked straight into the lad's eyes

and he nodded, and the lad sat still and understood. And all the men, looking, saw that, and they knew it too, just as he did, and the old cry began to run quick among them. 'Old D Squadron! Old D again!' till Old Fireproof shot an eye over them all and half laughed. 'Ay, he's D-Squadron stuff. We're another man to the good. We're doing well.'

"Then—'Give me the rein, serjeant-major,' he said, and with that he took the rein and away we went along the lines, all the squadron crowding after him, proud as hell in the faces of the other squadrons, till we came to where the Colonel was standing, with the Adjutant and the Brigade-Major and the O.C. Yeomanry.

"Three paces in front of him Old Fireproof halted, and like a soldier and a gentleman he saluted him, so doing it that half of us were ashamed to think how often we'd shirked saluting this officer or that. And then our Captain was going on to report in full regulation style, and for pure pleasure in his stubbornness the Colonel heard him out and smiled.

"But that was all. The Colonel wouldn't be regulation in return. He did return the salute, and he did salute the prisoner with a full salute. But then he said, 'Bring them over to the mess: they'll have a drink, I know, and we'll hear all about it.' So away went they that way, and the squadron back this way, smacking itself on the chest and calling out to the other squadrons, 'What about Fighting D now?'

"I seemed to be the only man that didn't move from there, and there somehow I stood and stayed till in a while the Adjutant passed me and spoke. 'Your crime has just been washed out by the Colonel's order.'

"I didn't say a word. I just thanked him. I guessed well how that had happened, but I stayed there still till the lad himself came back to me, smiling as lazy and as saucy as a school-boy.

"'It's all right, Tom,' he said. 'Old Fireproof begged you off. He told the Colonel I'd gone out more for that than anything. The Colonel swore a bit, but the Captain wouldn't back down, and you're all right again.'

“‘Am I?’ said I. ‘You’ll know more about that when you’ve grown a beard. You come to breakfast now.’ And we went.

“Well, and then we went over to the shelter-rig, and he got into the blankets. ‘Tom,’ says he, ‘the Colonel gave me a drink of champagne.’

“‘Did he?’ says I. ‘And when you wake up I’m going to give you the finest hiding you ever had. I’m going to teach you to snivel and whine, just because you got taken prisoner.’

“He looked at me and nodded. ‘I know what you mean. Old Fireproof told me that part of it too, just now, when I was leaving the mess. I’d never thought of it like that. However, I’ll know in future—and now I’ll sleep.’

“Sleep he did—like a bird. And when he waked up he was in orders as corporal—‘For good work done in the field,’ said the order book.”

The serjeant-major paused, a little smile from past happiness flickering in his face. But he had not told his tale out to my expectations. There was something still of the Captain to be told, if my instinct were not very far at fault. “And where had the Captain been using his horse and the two Mauser pistols, that night?” I asked.

“Ah,” roused the serjeant-major. “After the lad woke and told me his tale, I met the Captain and asked him that. But he smiled and took it lightly. ‘Oh, I went for a ride and got close to some Burghers, and there was some shooting.’

“I looked at him, and the boldness came to me till I could have put my hand on his shoulder in sureness if it weren’t for the thought of the squadron. But I spoke plain. ‘Sir,’ I said; ‘then you went out to look after the lad?’

“‘Has he told you that he saw me, then?’ asked the Captain quickly.

“‘No, sir,’ said I. ‘I know you would never have let him see you. But I know you went, all the same.’

“‘Yes, and you know, too, that that sort of tale, told in the squadron, would do neither the lad nor myself any good,’ answered the Captain. ‘The lad did his work well; from the

start to the finish he did splendidly; if he'd been my own brother I couldn't have wished him to do better. Why spoil the thing, then, by any suspicion that I did any part of it for him? Let the matter lie, serjeant-major. The lad's safe, and a man—what does the rest matter?

“‘Not much,’ said I: ‘but, sir, were you alone when you took on that brandwacht that was shooting at him?’

“‘Have you heard that any other man of the column was out last night, then?’ said the Captain smilingly.

“‘There were only two; the lad and you,’ I said, flat out. ‘And it must have been you who tackled it, and you must have done it alone.’

“‘Nay, not quite alone,’ the Captain said, and he was smiling softly. ‘There was the luck of the scout and the pity of Christ with me, too, as well as with the lad.’

“‘Oh!’ said I. ‘But how many men were in the brandwacht?’

“‘Only seven, as far as I could make out,’ he said.

“‘And how many of them did you kill?’ I asked him.

“‘What does that matter?’ he asked me. ‘That wasn't the problem at all. The problem was simply to stop them shooting at the lad, because they were not only shooting so straight, but they'd got on their feet and were starting to run and look for him. Of course, I knew he had horses, for I'd seen them tied up, and I knew that the going was good enough for him to gallop and get away from men afoot. But they did seem to be shooting so straight at him. You know how like rockets the red streaks of the cordite flash from the rifle muzzle across the dark. Well, and it seemed to me that the streaks almost reached the lad, and at that I weakened.

“‘Serjeant-major,’ he went on, and all of a sudden his face saddened; sad as an old man's face almost, as it seemed, just for a flash—‘serjeant-major, that's where I failed. I'd trusted him to the Lord God, inside the laager and out, and of course I knew where the brandwacht was lying, because I'd looked for that the first thing. If it had been you they were shooting at, I'd have just sat and smiled to myself, for I'd have known you'd

do the right thing without a second thought, and swing clear and come out far wide enough.

“ ‘But it was him, and not you, and he is so young, and so new to the game, and when that picket opened on him I hadn’t backbone enough, I was afraid. No, it’s no use easing off on it, the plain truth is that I was too much of a coward. I couldn’t stick it, and I ran in on the flank of the brandwacht and emptied the twenty Mauser bullets into it, and then the magazine carbine, with the bayonet on it showing at every flash, and so the picket went. The lad came out all right; he’s all right; he’s the brave one. I’m the one that’s wrong, I’m the coward, for I wilted and interfered, instead of leaving it where I started it, with the Lord God, right to the last step of it. So that’s one reason why you’ll say nothing to the squadron or the lad about my night-ride. And for another it would take too much of the stiffening out of the lad’s backbone if he thought he owed any least little chance to outside help. And that won’t do: he bought his manhood too splendidly for that: I saw enough of what he did to be able to tell you that.

“ ‘Serjeant-major, the lad’s a man now; that’s the point we gained, and that’s the point we’ll peg fast. The rest is no matter—we can afford to forget the rest.’ ”

I could not forbear breaking in upon the serjeant-major. “That was splendidly said,” I said. “D Squadron may well be ‘Fighting D’ if it be dealt with in those terms.”

The serjeant-major’s eye kindled. He nodded significantly. “Yes; I’ve been asked once or twice to take a commission in other corps that they’re raising here and there. I tell them that I’m not a fit man, I’m this, that, or the other short of what an officer should be. But the real reason is that I’m serjeant-major of Old Fireproof’s Squadron, and you can never be happy with any other crowd if once you’ve served with his. Just as he did with the lad that’s lying yonder, so he’s done with us all, more or less, according as we needed it, though with some of us neither he nor they remember any special part of it. It’s just the everyday contact that’s done it with some of us. They come to the squadron, heart-breakers some of them, but somehow he

makes men of them, even of some that nobody else would ever believe worth the cartridge it would take to blow them to blazes. He does it though ; he does it somehow ; no two fellows handled alike, no two turned out men alike, but all alike are men when he's had them but a little while. That, if you like, is the real word for him, not King-maker, but Maker of Men."

On that word the serjeant-major ended his story, and he was right. For, as it came to me then like a sudden ray of light, that was the one great lesson of Old Fireproof to all around him, that they should be men, men in truth ; men ; goodly men in heart, and after that the rest would matter little. And whenever I think of D Squadron now, it is as of men ; wild-hearted men, strange men, but men--splendid men.

CHAPTER XX

OF HOW A GIRL RODE ON COMMANDO, AND OF HOW WE RODE OUT
TO COMPASS THE DESTRUCTION OF THAT COMMANDO

THE serjeant-major tarried no long time with me after he had finished his story of the making of a man. Within a few minutes a corporal came to tell him that the ambulances were inspanned, ready to return to the column again, and so, with a strong hand-shake and a grave "So long, sir," he was gone, and I set my camp-chair outside my tent, where I could watch the procession of the ambulances trekking away across the feldt, till it should disappear beyond the near sky-line.

And I remember well that, when at length the ambulances had topped the last far rise and sunk from sight, I turned to my work amongst the wounded again with fresh strength, even though I did not dream then that, within three days more, I should once again come into touch with the Captain's people. Had I known that then, I should have had three days of the added pleasure of looking forward to the coming of my visitor, and three days' pleasure is something.

It was on the evening of the third day, as I was coming wearily back to my tent, that I found the door of it blocked by a saddled horse, whose master was stooping and calling my name softly to the dark within: "Mr. Allen! Mr. Allen!"

"Yes," I answered, whereat the man turned and greeted me with gladness. "Ah, padre; now it's all right. I've come in from the column with a batch of wounded and prisoners, and so, though I'm not quite a poor little orphan to-night, without a feed for his horse or a blanket for himself, yet I thought I'd

like to come and eat with you, you being an honorary member of Old D Squadron."

At that honour, done me so quippingly, my heart stirred my face to sudden merry smiles, and I spoke very eagerly, welcoming him; even though I did not then know that his Captain had first suggested that Mr. Mansel should convey the squadron's remembrances to me, which compliment Mr. Mansel had improved into this other, which he knew would gladden me still more, namely, dining with me.

"Ah, now, Mr. Mansel, I am very glad. Do, please, dismount and let me see to you," I said, my gladness running riot in my voice, and my heart glad of it.

Then, however, came a cheery struggle between us, for he would in no wise let me wait upon him, while my wayward Kaffir servant was away, as usual. "You see how you've spoiled your Kaffir," said Mr. Mansel, in his fatherly manner to me, after he had reduced me to the condition of one watching while he fed his horse, and built a little fire to make the coffee. 'Now, if you'd only just take your tent-mallet to him, and stiffen him out a few times, he'd be as good as gold, and he'd always be here when you wanted him. You do it once, and you won't have to speak twice to him after that. It's this brotherly love business that always ruins these poor beggars of Kaffirs."

I smiled softly in the dark. I knew the argument well, but I said nothing, for I knew also that this man who spoke had never laid a blow on his own Kaffir servants. They obeyed him as dogs obey their masters—for dogs always obey the right men—and the same thing ran all through Old Fireproof's squadron, in which every mess of two or three privates had its own irregular Kaffir servant. I myself am not one of the men whom Kaffirs obey, that is all.

This subject of the right treatment of Kaffirs being dropped, for lack of argument in me, we came to food, and here Lieutenant Mansel was again as an authority. "The ribs," he said; "the ribs of whatever your animal is, sheep or buck or what not—take the ribs, and of course the backbone they belong to, and let them have three or four days, in this climate to hang in the

wind and out of the sun. And then you make a nice little fire like this, of willow sticks if you can get them—there's a piece or two of willow here, you see—and let it burn to good hot coals, and lay the ribs over it across a couple of stones, like this. Salt your ribs well, turn them a time or two, have your good coffee made, have a piece of bread, if you can get it, and then sit down on your blankets—ready laid out for rolling into them when you've done eating and smoking—and there you have a meal that money couldn't buy for you in London. And when you've done eating, and wiped your fingers and your face with a tuft of grass, then take out your pipe and have a quiet smoke. And when that's done, you snake yourself into the blankets and you sleep; sleep as the Lord God intended men to sleep, when He filled the world with game and set man in it."

"Ah," I said, "it sounds splendid. My aunt is always wishing she'd been born a gipsy or a tinker."

"Your aunt seems to be a clinking good sort of chap," said Mr. Mansel very heartily. "The mess didn't smoke any other tobacco at all but hers till it was done. I'm mess president, and they want me to ask if you'll write to your aunt to place our order with that tobacconist of hers. What do you say, padre?"

"That my aunt will be proud as well as delighted to hear of your wish," I said. "She always says that she likes to see men enjoying a quiet smoke, she knows they're not in mischief then."

Mr. Mansel nodded, and a twinkle flitted in his eyes. "Padre," he said, "I think we shall have to make your aunt an imaginary-honorary-member of the mess, as soon as she sends that tobacco. You see, we've had to invent that rank, because of this Burgher girl that's riding with Vanrooi's commando out here. Since she's joined it she's so stirred it up to fight us that we've just been up to the eyes in it. So, as some sort of a mark of our appreciation and encouragement, we invented this rank and duly named her for it."

"Did the Captain propose that?" I asked smilingly.

"No: we did it; the three Lieutenants of us. Old Fireproof

just grinned a bit. 'All right, boys,' he said, 'we must see if we can't turn that imaginary-honorary-membership into a real live guestship at least. A girl so splendid *can* only be captured by the finest squadron in the world—Old D Squadron. And when we do capture her, gad! we'll do her royal courtesy. We'll turn the mess-tent over to her, and be her guests till we get to the railway.' I tell you, padre, he grew quite eloquent-looking over it."

"Ah; I have heard a deal about that girl," I answered. "I believe that Headquarters are very angry about her, and want to know why a special effort has not been made to capture her. Many girls have ridden with many commandoes, but none like her."

"Special effort!" returned Mr. Mansel, looking up from turning the ribs over the coals, in order to give due emphasis to his protest. "Special Billy-O! We've been making nothing but special efforts these dozen days past, trekking all over the shop at all sorts of tangents to get at the commando. Nine nights ago we had a special try, for our information seemed to lay the job out just to our hand. We marched all night and surrounded the position beautifully. At dawn we charged it gallantly—and met each other on the top.

"Then we looked round and saw the Boers, yonder behind us, quietly mounting and going away from various little koppiekies, and sluits, and dongas, all over the bally scenery. It was very cheering—to them. And it's happened like that three times since, and each time, when we've finished our antics and shut up the show, they've laid for us on the way back and slated us all the way home to camp. So next time we're going to try a new lay—and, padre, if you've any sort of interest in that sort of thing, you'd better come out with me to-morrow on three or four days' leave. We're only about ten miles out, and the next move is sure to find us right up to the neck in the middle of the girl's commando. Come now, there'll be work for a chaplain there, at least as much as here, if we do get into them. There'll certainly be dead to bury, if there's nothing else. You'd better come along."

I shook my head with a slow smile. In spite of Mr. Mansel's genial attempt to provide me with an excuse—"there would certainly be dead to bury"—the thing savoured too much of the worst kind of sensation-mongering to warp me into consenting all at once. "If I had been detailed to your column—" I said. "As it is—I'm afraid not."

Lieutenant Mansel, however, was not to be abashed at the first refusal. "Ah, but you'd better think it over. And these ribs are done to a touch. By the time you've filled up your ribs with these ribs, and washed them down with this good coffee, you'll see things differently."

I only smiled and, for sheer pleasure of his company rather than any conscious courtesy, made myself the guest of my guest by sitting down on the ground with him, a little way from the little fire, and eating there, instead of using my canvas table as was my custom. And though that side of the world which is represented by tables is doubtless the greater side, yet must I say that the other side, which is represented by the edge of the camp fire, goes to one's heart with a touch that stirs strange airs within one's soul—When the world was young! ah, when the world was young!

Very pleasant in my memory lies the remembrance of that meal taken in the company of the indomitable Mr. Mansel. Full of strange tales he was, and of strange outlooks on familiar things, giving them new aspects that astonished one a little.

And, so great is remembrance of that and other meals within me that sometimes, since I have come home, I steal away into the little coppice which is part of my glebe, and there, building a small fire of sticks, I take from my pocket a surreptitious chop, stealthily abstracted from the pantry when the kitchen was temptingly empty, and, cooking that chop where the flickering leaves let the barred sunlight through to the darkling coals, with the savour of the cooking flesh I sniff again the savour of that evening meal, beside my tent in the far feldt, and relish once more the whole-hearted comment and frank decisions on things of that guest of whom I truly was the real guest, both in

pleasure gained then and warm memories laid up for greyer days. And in the end I can say truly that, when I answered him to his heart's desire, namely, that I would get leave and come out to the column with him, it was not that I might see any fighting, or be present at the capture of any heroine, but wholly and solely that I might spend a few happy days in the company of such free souls as Mr. Mansel and the rest of Old Fireproof's men. And thus, by the way of that evening's good company, behold me next morning, duly mounted on my good little horse, riding out with Lieutenant Mansel and his troop to rejoin their column.

Noon was not high yet when we reached the camp, in a spot chosen as much for the abundance of grass and water for the horses as for anything else. A long ridge ran this side the camp: a long ridge beyond it, and doubtless there were strong pickets on both, though I could see no sign of them. In between the ridges, in a sort of shallow flat set with one pleasant farmstead, lay the camp, lazily basking in the strong sunshine as we rode down into it.

All were lazily busy. By the water-side many men were washing their clothes, some washing themselves. On every hand were clothes drying, and blankets and karosses spread in the sun to bake dry. Rifles were being cleaned, little messes were being finickinly cooked, kit was being overhauled, or saddles attended to, while here and there some man lay with a precious book or paper, lazily enjoying the leisure hours of the daily romance he was unappreciatively living, by reading the stuff invented by mere writers; writers who usually keep themselves untrammelled of facts by carefully keeping themselves out of all those ways of life that are not at the elbow of every Mr. Tittoo.

Mr. Mansel saw my eye roving and kindling. "Yes," he said: "to-day's just a dog-watch. You've noticed the men in the dog-watch on board ship, haven't you? No? Ah, that's these passenger steamers, where it's pretty well always the dog-watch, for all they do at any time. But you go to sea in a creaking, heaving, old wind-jammer; a sailing vessel; and you'll

soon know. You ought just to make one voyage in a sailing ship: it would do you all the good in the world. You try it when this war's over."

I thanked him courteously for his advice, which, however, I have not taken. That which was less to men of Old Fireproof's kind than a different route to his seaside holiday place is to the grocer at home, was an undertaking all too huge for such an unadventurous one as I. And so, though my thanks were none the less genuine for that, yet I had more interest in the scene about me than in any prospect of some day going a-sailing on any "old wind-jammer."

I noticed that the mess-tent of D Squadron was, in fact, the only tent in all the squadron. It was a beautifully made square tent of green canvas, none too large, and had been captured from the Boers, who had taken it from some Yeomanry, who had brought it out from home, where it had been specially made for them.

The cheery doctor was sitting in the doorway of the tent as we dismounted. "Ah, by the piper, now, padre!" he cried. "I thought the day wasn't so bright a day for nothing. Come inside my hospital tent that I'm leaving these sweeps use for a mess tent."

"Yes," said Mr. Mansel to me. "Do you know what this beggar does? He no sooner sees us capture this tent than he joins our mess like a burglar, and then, if he's got a blessed beggar with a tummy-ache, or that had the dirt scraped off his hide with a bullet shave, why, he turns us out to grass and makes them pitch the tent by his ambulance for a bally hospital, and then invites us to hold our mess in his bally bell-tent and look happy."

"And what does the Captain say to that?" I said laughingly, careful to take part with neither.

"Sure," put in the doctor, "he tells the beggars they're lucky to have a tent at all: and what do they want with a tent anyhow, says he. And so say I: look at the fat on them now."

I had noted that the other two Lieutenants of the squadron

were within the tent, for they rose to greet me with extended hands and cheery voices, and now the Canadian, Mr. Mcfloy, gave the pleasant squabble a new turn. "Sir," he said to me: "You've just come in time. What'll you give us for a good tent?—this one? We want to sell it and buy a worse one, or draw one for nothing from the Ordnance; one that the doctor won't commandeer, and then the beggar will have to apply for one for himself."

"Oh, sure," retorted the doctor contentedly, "I'd apply for one to-morrow, and draw it in double quick time, if the Government had the sense to have tents half as good as this, instead of the bally things they do serve out. It's the same way with the ambulances. Here's Australia sends out a Field Hospital, and her own pattern of ambulance, a pattern that's as far ahead of ours as ours is ahead of a stone-sled in a quarry. But our fat-headed Government go on issuing the same old pattern, and so I have to commandeer Boer vans for my sick and wounded, or else be accessory to daily manslaughter."

"Oh, have a drink with me, padre," put in Mr. Mansel heartily. "Here's good water and here's whisky — I'll just pour you a small drink: not too much whisky, you being tee-total, but just enough to kill the microbes."

The doctor came to my rescue with a brisk laugh.

"Ah, now, that excuse won't do any more. The latest discovery is that the whisky doesn't kill the microbes at all; it only makes them drunk."

"Ho! Better still!" retorted Mr. Mansel triumphantly. "Have another drink and keep them drunk, then. They'll do you no harm while they're singing that they 'won't go home till morning.'"

"Padre," put in the Australian Lieutenant, Mr. Kingstone, "never mind these babies. Come in and sit down. Scoff will be up soon,—five minutes or so—and the Captain will be back from the Colonel's tent by then. They're marking out our next move to capture this girl and her commando. Ah, here he comes now."

I turned to look, and here was the Captain, with a fine smile and a welcome to me, making me sit at his right hand as we

went to food, which was just being laid on the grass outside, for there were neither chairs nor tables in this Spartan mess. Moreover, there was little here of dainties from the Field Force canteen, but game of different sorts in plenty, from quail to paauw, that is, wild turkey, which latter is surely the tenderest meat in the whole world.

Not till the meal was at last ended did the Captain broach the plan which the Colonel and he had settled on for the next move. Then he said, quite easily, "Old D Squadron again, boys. We've got the right of the line once more. We're to start out alone to-night; just the squadron of us, and range round till we get fast to Vanrooi's commando at dawn, show Vanrooi how few we are, so that he'll jump us with every man he's got, and then we must hang on to whatever position we can take till the column can see the two smoke fires we'll build, and gallop up and surround the whole position."

"Oh," spoke Mr. Mansel, with a sarcastic smile. "We're to be the lamb to lure the wolf."

"That is one way of putting it," answered the Captain, smiling.

A merry grin went round the other faces, only interrupted by the slow question of Mr. Kingstone. "And what time do we start!"

"Our own time, so I've made it an hour after dark," returned the Captain. "Vanrooi is in those long sugar-bush rands, the other side of Springbuck-laagte. Of course we could reach him at dawn if we left here at midnight, as the rest of the column will. But you know the trouble of getting sleepy men out of their blankets an hour before midnight. We'll have none of that. The night's not cold: it's dry, too—we'll just dismount at Steinkamp's farm and let the fellows sleep there, inside the orchard wall, while a few of us go forward and nose out Vanrooi's exact position. He'll be within four miles of Steinkamp's at the outside, and so, if the squadron's in the saddle again half an hour before dawn, that will give us quite time enough both to sleep and to buckle fast to Vanrooi at dawn."

"And which way will the column come?" asked Mr. McHoy.

"Round by Serfontein's," answered the Captain. "We shall take the two tripod Colt guns with us, and you'll see that all your men have two hundred rounds apiece, besides as much more as they like to carry. Four biscuits a man, too, and half a feed of oats in the nosebags. That's all, I think; except that the shooting-match you fellows made this morning with the M.I. had better come off now, while we've nothing else to do."

"Oh, did you two beggars make a match with the Ikonas then?" demanded Mr. Mansel of the other two Lieutenants. "What conditions?"

"Oh, we four, Captain and three Lieutenants, against their four; any range they like from eight to eight hundred yards," answered Mr. Kingstone cheerily, and at once the talk broke into a genial discussion of marks and scoring for the coming match.

"That's all, I think." I repeated the words in my mind, as I noted that these leaders of to-night's desperate adventure seemed far more interested in the shooting-match with their comrades of the column, than in the sterner shooting of to-morrow's dawn.

Moreover, at the shooting-match itself, which they won handsomely, their interest seemed to be so merrily alive, though by the time it was ended they were within three hours of mounting for the march, that I had almost classed them with the unfeeling ones, in spite of myself. Nay, I even hinted my doubts to the Captain as we returned to the mess-tent. "Captain," I said, "your Lieutenants seem to be no way impressed with to-morrow's fight. They seemed to enjoy this afternoon's shooting match as though there were no to-morrow."

"If they didn't they would be no Lieutenants of mine," he answered promptly.

But it must have been that my manner conveyed more than my words, for he began afresh, in another tone. "Take it this way," he said. "When you at home have a tree to cut down, out of your garden hedge, you consider it long, and which way you will begin, what tools you will use, and how, and so forth. But if you watch, say, a lumberman in Canada, or an axeman in Tasmania, at work, you see him take the trees as he comes to

them; one glance goes up and decides if the tree be worth falling, another decides which side it must be scathed to fall it the right way, a third chooses the footing and the clearest swing for the axe, and the fourth sees the first blow bite through the bark. And so he goes on, tree after tree, taking each as it comes, making no fuss for the simple reason that he is an old hand at the job, and with his old-handed skill he knows that he can deal with any tree as he finds it. They're all one: some need one plan, some another, but they're all only trees and to come down. They all come down."

I smiled softly. "But you miss my great point," I said. "Trees have no axes wherewith to strike back. The Boer commandoes are not trees; they have rifles."

"Oh, I see your point now," smiled the Captain, like one relieved of a problem or a doubt. "You mean that some of us may get killed. But that's been a pretty common situation with most of us long before this war started. And since then; well, the man who has been under fire for a twelvemonth or so has pretty well made up his mind to some theory of life and death by this time, or he wouldn't keep serving on. But you will see when dawn comes—I suppose you will be coming with us?"

"I will come gladly," I answered, somehow feeling a sudden glow of comfort in the thought that I was going also, and no longer troubled by my former doubts, though I was not conscious of any great argument used against them. However, I dare be bold and say that it would have been enough for almost any man, unseasoned as I, to have suddenly found himself included in what seemed almost a forlorn hope, to make him take easily things which may have seemed of even great importance a moment before.

The remaining three hours before the ride, however, seemed no busier with this Captain and his Lieutenants than the earlier hours. True, the Captain had a two minutes' conversation with my old friend the serjeant-major, and each Lieutenant held a sort of Short Catechism of question and answer with some serjeant, but that seemed all. Only as the edge of dark began to drop did any stir begin, for then the men began to unrig the

various little shelter-tents they had made with blankets or canvas, and to roll up their kits and throw them down by the transport waggons.

The mess-tent also was struck, and we took our supper out on the grass by the light of the mess-cook's fire, and as I looked round I saw that the squadron-lines were all a-twinkle with little fires, where the men made coffee and cooked little messes of looted pork or poultry, or captured beef or mutton. I am afraid that Rostron's Horse troubled little whether the force was on full rations, or half rations, or none at all. Rostron's Horse was never on any but overflowing rations, so long as the enemy had anything in the way of farm-stock left to capture or annex. Had our whole army been composed of regiments like Rostron's, then the Boers would have had to send to us for rations to enable them to continue the war long enough to give it dignity.

Yet, as I sat there, watching those twinkling little fires, I am afraid that the sentimentalizing born of much reading was uppermost. "Sir," I said to the Captain, "the men seem to be very busy with their suppers, and this new wind brings a savoury smell across to us from them. I am thinking to how many of them this will be the last meal on earth."

"To very few, I hope, padre," he replied, with quick cheeriness. "But you are looking at it in the wrong light, the Society light; the light that reckons a dinner as something well nigh to sacramental; a thing at least the chief business of the day. You should look at it our way. To us the chief business of the day is the day's work. Dinner or any other meal is just something taken to keep us going. Many of the men just eat a biscuit when they get hungry, and make a drink of tea or coffee or cocoa whenever they feel like it and have the chance. They make no bones of a meal. No, the fellows are tucking in yonder, but that's no great convention served: that's merely so that they shan't suffer any inconvenience from hunger before morning. That is all."

"That was all" again. I found that the phrase was a very common one with him, born of a resolute first-hand view of life and of things which most of us meekly continue to look at

according to the cumulative dicta of generations of those book-worms who measure things according to the dogmatisms of print or ancient scripts, people who would have been most unhappy as members of an Irregulars' Mess.

Then in the dark I heard the squadron "falling in." Unwilling horses were half led, half dragged, the few yards out into the open, and one heard the voices of comrades inquiring of each other as they went—"You got the coffee?" "Yes—you got the meat?" and so on, and over that the voices of corporal or serjeant hurrying the men out of the lines to the mustering ground. Then the three Lieutenants got up and went to the troops; next the doctor rose to examine the pack-horse which his ambulance corporal brought for his inspection by the light of the fire and a lantern. Lastly, the Captain looked at his watch. "Five minutes," he said. Then to me—"Time to mount, padre."

With that he stood to his feet, and immediately a silent Kaffir brought a brown horse out of the darkness into the fire-light, ready saddled and bitted, while another Kaffir brought mine. That brown horse was the one which had carried the Captain out into the Schoonfontein country, on the night young Palliser captured the Commandant, as I remembered. But there was no time for more than remembrance before we were both mounted and pressing away into the darkness towards the mustered squadron.

The four lines of ghostly men and horses, one troop behind another, looked silent in the dark, save for the champing of bits or the cough of the horses. One ghostly figure rode out a length or two towards us, and a voice, Mr. Mansel's voice, came quiet and distinct. "Numbers all correct, sir: a hundred and seventeen of all ranks, beside yourself and the doctor and the two tripod-Colt's people."

"Thank you, Mr. Mansell," answered the Captain in the same tone. "Have the men been warned about smoking?"

"Yes, sir," answered the Lieutenant.

"Then dismount them till I go across and report to the Colonel, and see if he has any further instructions."

"Very good, sir," replied the Lieutenant, turning towards the squadron, while the Captain rode away into the dark towards the Colonel's quarters.

"Squadron! dis—mount!" said Mr. Mansel easily, and the movement of dismounting ran through the ranks as easily; no haste; no flurry.

The other two Lieutenants came round and joined Mr. Mansel and myself in front of the squadron; the doctor came from somewhere and dismounted with us, the old serjeant-major stepped into the group also.

"What's the weather going to be for us, serjeant-major?" asked the doctor casually.

"Good; those clouds won't matter, the wind being what it is," answered the serjeant-major, also casually.

Then another man joined us, the Lieutenant in charge of the two little Colt guns. "What ho, Glentie!" spoke Mr. Kingstone to him. "Got the nosebags on the guns for a last feed before we start?"

"No, the nosebags were missing. They told me Lieutenant Kingstone had borrowed them to carry the V.C.'s and C.B.'s he's going to get to-night," returned Mr. Glentie, who, being a Scot, was always ready with a dry return to any joke.

Almost at once, as it seemed, the Captain came riding back. "All right; mount the squadron," he said to the group of us.

The men did not wait for Mr. Mansel to give the order. They had heard the Captain's voice and were already moving to mount when the Lieutenant said, "Get mounted!"

"This way," said the Captain in the next breath, starting his horse in the new direction.

"Come along, boys," said Mr. Mansel, swinging his leg over the saddle and starting off after the Captain.

The two right-hand men of the first troop pressed forward after the Lieutenant, the next two followed them, then the next, and so on, like pulling a string out of a box, and just then the doctor spoke to me. "Come on, padre; let's keep to the

head of the squadron, if we don't want to be choked and blinded and lost by the dust."

"Thank you," I said, and put my horse into motion, stride by stride with his as he cantered along to overtake the Captain.

And that was all. That was the way we started on the adventure which even these men, half desperadoes themselves, some of them, confessed as being "likely to be a bit stuffy if it hadn't been Old Fireproof and D Squadron that was doing it."

Truly that was all, as memory recalls it, save that, for an additional illumination, I remember how, as we went, we passed an outpost a little while before we overtook the Captain, and a voice came from the eerie group—"Good-bye, D Squadron. We'll come along to-morrow and bury you."

From our own ranks came an instant retort, a boy's voice ringing it clear through the night. "You mean you'll come along on fatigue, to make coffee for us and bury what we kill, carry what we wound, and guard what we take prisoners. You're not much good at fighting, but you do make good servants for old D Squadron."

A round laugh followed, both from our ranks and the outpost, mingled with jeering "Baa! Baa!" and catcalls, that continued till the last of the squadron had passed.

As we came to the head of the string I heard a figure speak and so knew it for the Captain. "Ah, Mr. Allen! Ah, doctor! Pretty dark for riding in to-night."

"Pretty dark," answered the doctor. "I hope this Joan of Arc is afraid of the dark—Ho! d'ye hear me poetizing now? But that's the way of a man when he's after a girl."

Even I could not forbear a smile at that, though in the next breath I added—"Poor girl! I hope no bullet touches her."

"Amen to that," said the Captain fervently.

And that fervency of his comforted me not a little as we rode on into the night.

CHAPTER XXI

OF WHAT MY AUNT SAID, AND OF A NEW WAY TO ESCAPE DYING
IN THE WORKHOUSE; AND FURTHER, OF HOW WE TIED RAW-
HIDES TO THE TAILS OF WILD COLTS AND WHAT WE WON
THEREBY

IN spite of all my doubts and dread of the morning's fight, I have but a series of scenes from that night ride in my memory, instead of one connected recollection of the whole. Truth to tell, for all my lively imaginings of to-morrow, the night was my accustomed time for sleep, and sleep I did, ever and anon, for what must have been long stretches of the march, since all my memories added together account for very few miles of it.

Sometimes it was the kindly doctor who was riding by my knee when I waked: sometimes the Captain himself or Mr. Mansel. Once, however, it was the serjeant-major, for my horse had forged on and caught up with him, whereby I found that his duty for this march was to ride some thirty yards ahead, with two men and the two Kaffir guides, showing the way.

Again, I remember turning my horse to avoid a bush, and the next thing I remember was Mr. McHoy speaking kindly to me, his hand on my arm to wake me the while. "Well, padre," he was saying, "this night air does make one sleepy. But if you must sleep, you'd better leave your rein slack, and then your horse will keep with the crowd, instead of being reined out here in the feldt, like this. I'm bringing up the rear—that's my job to-night, and but for my horse I'd have passed on and you'd

have been left in the feldt. I couldn't see you, but he would keep cocking his ears and half turning his head to look this way, so I came, and it was you."

"Ah! I am very sorry," I said sleepily, feeling that I should be very much ashamed of myself if I were not so sleepy. "And which way are the men gone?" I asked, staring stupidly about me, and seeing nothing, hearing nothing.

"Drop your rein and start your horse," replied the lieutenant. "He's been funkng getting left while you've been sleeping."

I dropped my rein, and at once my horse started at a brisk walk, quite at right angles to the direction I should have chosen.

Mr. McHoy kept alongside and continued his monitions. "The best way, till you get used to these night affairs, is to get down and walk the moment you feel sleepy. Or wet your eyelids, or drink cold water, or something of that sort. And if you can manage to fight it off for half an hour you're likely to beat it altogether."

While he was speaking he had lifted his horse to a canter, mine following suit, and then, as if we were men in a dream, all in a stride we seemed to come upon a ghostly clump of riders, pressing stolidly forward in a moving cloud of dust. True, their horses' hoof-beats on the ground sounded muffled in the trampled dust, yet they did sound, whereas there was a silence on the men themselves all eerie, making them seem as if they were the phantoms of some old folk-tale, imagined in pagan days. And of all the things I remember of that night, this silence of the men remains the vividest. Yet the Captain said it was but the silence of sleepiness.

My next awaking after that was to find myself beside a great barn and stables—we had reached the farm where we were to dismount, and Mr. Kingstone was telling me to climb down and come inside, where a drop of coffee would soon set me right.

Pickets had been placed, house, buildings, kraals, garden and orchard, as well as the little koppie overhanging the whole, had

been occupied by the time I got my sleep-sodden wits together, while, strangely enough, I saw that the Captain and the serjeant-major were making themselves comfortable in the barn, where they squatted over a little fire of newly-lit mealie-cobs, sharing the light and warmth with the two work Kaffirs of the farm. Indeed, they were holding quiet gossip with those two Kaffirs, seemingly shrewd wit and dry jests for the more part, as far as I could guess by what the serjeant-major was required to interpret, whenever the Captain's scanty stock of the Taal language ran out.

I confess that I did not quite know whether to wonder at the frivolity of some of the Captain's quips, or to wonder at his freshness in that, after riding till such an hour, he should still relish such idle talk. For not till I had listened vaguely for some ten minutes or more did it slowly dawn upon my unskilled mind that the Captain was at serious work indeed, picking the Kaffirs clean of information without ever once asking a direct question, or letting his drift appear.

While he talked, Mr. Mansel stopped at the threshold with me and stood, an attentive listener, till the Captain rose and came out, saying quietly, "We are within forty minutes of Vanrooi. Alterman's commando; a pretty strong commando; joined him this afternoon, so they'll be spread over quite a sizeable patch of koppies. I'll just go in and have a bite and a mouthful of coffee, and then I'll take a couple of the fellows, and these two Kaffirs, and look out the position. We'll have to be a bit careful how we open up at dawn, now there's two commandoes instead of one. And I want you to choose a man to carry word of this new commando to the Colonel, where he'll be at sun-up."

"Right then," answered Mr. Mansel, and went off to obey, while I strode sleepily alongside the Captain across into the farmhouse.

In the great fore-chamber, or front room of the house, we found the doctor already at his ease, the house Kaffirs busy making coffee, and the woman of the house, together with two grown-up daughters in hastily snatched clothes, sitting in a

subdued group in one corner, but answering already to the doctor's genial sympathy.

Even here, however, sleep overpowered me again, and while I do remember stretching myself on one of the dark-wood couches, I do not remember any coffee, or indeed anything at all, until the doctor's hand on my shoulder and his voice in my ear roused me again. "Come, padre, we're just going to mount for the attack."

This was not two o'clock in the morning. Rather it was nearer five, but I remember vividly what a huge distaste for all war and danger surfeited all my senses as I sat stiffly to my feet desolately realizing that the desperate moment was near at hand. My heart shivered sleepily with a sick desire to be allowed to remain in this comfortable farmhouse and sleep on, rather than face the chill ride in the dawn, and then the mad lunacy of the fight as it had been planned.

Fortunately, I was not shameless enough to put my desire into words, but lurched out to my horse without a word, feeling wondrous old and very shrunken, all my veins dry of all ambition. Without a word either I mounted, and would have ridden off as dumbly but that the doctor sang out to one of the Kaffir girls, who brought me a cup of grateful coffee to warm my heart at starting.

After that cup of coffee I kept close to the doctor, which indeed was my proper place, yet I had no word to say for the first half-mile, till the doctor made a comment. "Padre," he said, "are you just feeling good and miserable, like all the rest here, bar perhaps twenty?"

My heart stirred a little at his brave confession. "Truly I do not feel very glad," I answered.

"Glad!" chuckled the doctor. "Say it right out, padre: say that you're just one slough of disgust, wondering how in the name of heaven it is that men can be such utter idiots as to go to war. You're chafing to yourself with contempt that men shouldn't stop at home and let the police and the magistrates settle the business quietly, in decent

fashion, while they themselves went to bed at Christian hours, and rang for their shaving water when they woke up of a morning."

I could scarce contain the rush of brotherly love towards the doctor, for his bold words flung at the war fever in peoples. "I do fear I am not cut out for a warrior, doctor," I said. "My aunt told me so before I came. 'John,' she said, 'don't be foolish. You stop at home and let those go to war that want ribbons and medals, with a band marching in front, and police and volunteers keeping the crowd off the roadway. If governments intend to make war, they should train men enough for the war first. Amateurs will never finish a piece of work in workman-like manner: it doesn't stand to reason. You stop at home, John, and pay your taxes,' she said."

"And now you're wishing you'd done so," chuckled the doctor. "Faith, your aunt must be a fine woman to know, and if she'd only get up on a platform now, and talk just that much sense to the public, it would—take fifty policemen to get her safe out of the building, from the clutches of the bold heroes who fight battles every day out of the morning papers."

The doctor paused to chuckle again before he continued. "Well, and out of this hundred and twenty of us, more or less, there's ninety that feel like us, if there isn't a hundred and one. Faith! I'll be bolder, and I'll say right out that, if it wasn't for just one of us, there's not one of us that wouldn't like to roll down into the blankets here, now, and sleep till the sun burnt a hole in his eyes in the morning, and then get up and fight comfortably. It's only the one that planned this thing that wouldn't turn back, no, not if the Devil with a flaming sword stood in the way.

"And that's the way of this world. One man with God's curse—or the Devil's—of doing things upon him, plans a thing that should be done, says his soul, and then the rest, that don't know what ails them but they're not content, get up and follow the one, and then there's a smash of something somewhere. Faith! it's been said that we're most of us fools, we human beings, but

if this crowd we're with is any sample, then I'll go farther and say we're all fools. For all the rest of us are here at this mad hour on this mad job just because Old Fireproof took a mad notion that this was the best chance to smash Vanrooi's commando that's got so cheeky since the girl joined it. But sure, if you could get two doctors and a magistrate out here at this blessed minute, sitting as a commission in lunacy or whatever it is, and we to tell them all about the woman with the sapphire eyes, heiress of Vron Aig, and then to explain the crazy job we're on, they'd leave ye hardly time to wink before they'd have signed the order to land Old Fireproof in the nearest asylum, as a strait-waistcoat case of the worst type. And is it not strange that a man so sensible should be such a fool?"

"Ah," I began, and doubtless I should have made some long moralizing answer, but that, just then, the little column halted. Whereat the doctor cut me short without ceremony, saying, "Come on now, padre," straightway putting his horse to its best "tripple" towards the head of the column, where the Captain was.

We reached the front in time to hear the Captain give an order quietly. "Form the squadron," he commanded, and immediately the men began to ride into position and halt again, troop behind troop, in the same formation as when they paraded for this march.

Then, "Officers this way," he went on, drawing a little aside, out of earshot of the squadron.

Quickly we all gathered to him, where he halted, and none of us missed a word of what he said as he began, in a voice as quiet as if we were all at home, "You see this long line of black ridge here in front of us? As a matter of fact, it is a long succession of ironstone ridges and koppies, and the Burghers are in them. Just where the heart of the two commandoes is I can't say, for there's water practically all along the position, and we can get no information as to just where the Commandants have camped. I've tested the koppies at two or three points, and found Boers each time,—little laagers here and

there—and with a position like this they can afford to scatter themselves pretty thinly along it.”

“But,” suggested Mr. McHoy, “there’s the girl. She’d naturally like to sleep in a house, and the Commandants would naturally camp near her, so if there’s a farmhouse in these koppies, that should be the place to strike, it seems to me. The map says there’s several farms along here.”

“Yes, but the farmhouses and buildings are all out on the flat, a mile or two away from the ridges,” answered the Captain patiently. “Besides, all the information is positive that she never sleeps in a house, but always in her own light van. Of course, if I could have found out where the van is, we’d have gone in and brought her out prisoner quietly first. As it is, we’ll have to choose our point and strike in. So here we are, and here we’ll strike, straight in here, as soon as the stars sicken.”

“Right,” said Mr. Mansel, and “Right!” said the other two.

“Just in front here, a couple of hundred yards on, is a Kaffir kraal,” went on the Captain. “The Kaffirs are gone, unfortunately, but there’s a patch of Kaffir corn standing to the right of it. Mr. Glentie, when we move on, I want you to get one gun into position towards the right-hand corner of that patch, to support us if we have to fall back; but you’ll keep the other gun on its horse and send it after us, the moment we get the first ridge. And as soon as you hear that gun in action, then pack up the one you’ll have with you in the corn, set the corn on fire, and come after us like the devil. You understand?”

“I do, sir,” replied Lieutenant Glentie.

“Thank you,” answered the Captain. “Don’t forget to set the corn on fire—and now let us see the time.”

Mr. Mansel opened his cloak in front, Mr. Kingstone dived his head inside, taking with him his watch in his left hand and a match in his right. I heard a match strike, though I saw no light through any chink of the cloak, and then Mr. Kingstone was standing upright again, announcing the time to us as being

so-and-so (I do not remember the exact time he gave), and that it would "be dawn in twenty minutes."

"Right!" said the Captain. "Now, I've pitched on this point because the koppie ahead here is detached enough for holding, is not too big for our force, counting the machine-guns, and it can't be quite surrounded by the Burghers after we take it, because it has this open flat on this side, and one gun can clear this flat in no time if they try it. Besides, they'll be watching for the rest of our people to come across this flat, the same way as we did, whereas the column is swinging round to cut in from behind."

"As to what's in the koppie already, there's a little laager of a couple of dozen waggons or so, strung along in a broadish flat behind it, and a few Cape carts on the slope of the koppie itself, but not many. My job then will be to take the serjeant-major's troop—it's just thirty strong—and get behind the koppie, and charge that little laager, and set it on fire at once. That will bring what burghers there are on the koppie over to that side, while you boys rush it from this side and both flanks. You, Mr. Mansel, will take your troop to the left and rush the koppie from that flank, where there's a neck from another koppie beyond that gives you clear galloping to within twenty yards or so of the top. But once you've got the top, then you'll have to be lively in getting your horses up and under cover, or they'll be killed from the koppie behind you.

"You, Mr. McHoy, will do the same thing from the right flank of the koppie, while you, Mr. Kingstone, will charge straight at it from this side, where you can ride right to the rim of it. Once you get to the rim, there should be no chance for them ever to dislodge you.

"Now, as soon as you boys get up there, you'll turn loose like Bedlam across the top, and if I can I'll bring the other troop up the other side, in which case we should get what Burghers there are on the koppie itself. But, remember, we'll all have to move like splashing iron out of a bursting furnace, if we're going to put it through without paying too heavy for it.

"So that's all, I think; and now we'll mount and go,"

ended the Captain, turning and swinging up into the saddle again.

"That's all"—again that phrase, and that was all. I even caught myself repeating the words in my mind as I mounted too, and reined my horse alongside that of the doctor.

"Mr. Allen," said the Captain to me then, as if he spoke out of an afterthought—"if you wouldn't mind helping the doctor?—there may be cases of men being hit, you know."

"Very good, sir," I answered, quite regulation-like.

But as the whole body of us began to move off, just as a red tinge rose in the east with a dusty greyish belt above it, my marvelling broke into words unawares—"Not a trace of heroics," I was saying.

"Faith, no!" quoth the doctor beside me. "No more heroics about the business than five tramps plotting to rob a hen-roost at home. And if he speaks to the men it'll be something ye never expected, and never the same thing twice. Perhaps we'll hear something this time."

We did hear, and truly enough it was something one never expected, or could believe would be said twice. As we checked for a moment at the edge of the few acres of dead Kaffir corn-stalks, the Captain raised his voice, yet not so much raising it above its common pitch as bringing it out so strong that it would carry well forward. "Gentlemen," he said. "This is a true D-Squadron job. You've got a fine chance of escaping dying in the workhouse at home, or down by the waterside in some sweating port round the Horn or up along Asia. But it's a job that will have to be done in old D-Squadron fashion, or it can't be done at all, remember that."

"Well, Captain, and there's only one squadron in the world that can do the job in D-Squadron style, and this hyer's the one, you bet," came an answer from the ranks, in a strong American accent.

Whereat some of the men laughed, and more of them answered in low voices, "This is D Squadron, Captain; old D, every time."

"Right, gentlemen," returned the Captain heartily. "That's

what I told the Colonel when he thought this thing couldn't be done: this was D Squadron. And now we'll get on and get the job done."

"Didn't I tell ye, padre?" whispered the doctor chucklingly as we moved forward. "So now you know; if ever ye do come to die in the workhouse; that it's not because ye never had the chance to escape it by getting killed here. Come on, now."

"And what are you going to do?" I asked, not having time to answer the joke.

"Keep with the Captain," said the doctor downrightly. "It'll be thicker where he is; it always is. But horses don't come down and men don't get hit following him, and no ground's bad enough or fire thick enough to stop him once he starts. And if you want another reason, well, if by any breach of the rules one of his men should drop in for it, then he'll have to be tied up and carried to cover inside less than no time, or he'll have to lie there unlooked to till the day's finished, once the ridges all round begin slogging the one we're after. And if all that's not enough, why, 'Let me be killed far in front when I am killed,' as the Captain says."

I had not time to consider this explanation before the Captain's voice came out in an order, slow and ringingly distinct. "Now, Mr. Mansel—And remember to give me time to hit the laager first."

Instantly came Mr. Mansel's voice in turn—"Very good, sir. Number One troop! this way. Bring up the right shoulder: steady on the left. Open out from the right. Keep a steady pace now and keep up."

The tone of that string of orders was as if an iron bell with but one note were ringing it out, and as the men obeyed, and the troop drew away to the left, clearing our front, I heard the Captain's voice again, as before—"Now, Mr. McHoy."

And again, as with the first troop, I heard Mr. McHoy's voice come insistingly—"Number Two troop! this way. Bring up the left shoulder: steady on the right. Open out from the left, and come along steadily."

Then still again the Captain's voice—"Mr. Kingstone; keep straight on. Remember to give the other two troops time to get into position, and wait till you hear me rush the laager. And when you do ride at the koppie, then ride like the Flames of God!"

"Right, sir!" rang out the Australian's answer, and even in the tone of those two words I heard the same fire kindling, ready to flare into furnace-fury at the first stride of the charge. The Captain had chosen his lieutenants well.

"And now, serjeant-major," cried the Captain last of all, and straightway came my grey friend's deep voice—"Troop! Files right! Trot!"—followed in twenty strides by—"Files left! Walk!"

"Don't open out yet," said the Captain then. "Come along with me, at a steady pace; we've got farthest to go. Canter!"

Away surged the troop after him, and at the same instant the doctor's voice spoke in my ear. "Come along, padre. We'll ride *serre-file* to this troop, and we'll have to ride like hell before we finish."

"Or like the Flames of God," I answered, feeling my nerves tingling and my heart lifting within me as I roused out that splendid simile. Yea, I lifted my rein and stretched my good horse after the galloping troop with a good heart after that, keeping knee to knee with the doctor.

Ghostlily we overtook and left Mr. McHoy and his troop, well on our left, and then I looked up, for the stars had sickened overhead, a belt of dusty grey was lifting like a curtain over the east, and the koppies were changing colour, so that I saw the one we were to take standing clear of the rest. We came to a donga, crossed it in rushing clumps, and re-formed at rowelling pace on the other side.

"Open out now," came the word, low and distinct, for we were coming under that flank of the koppie that Mr. McHoy was to charge, and as the men took their distances at the gallop I not only caught the grey gleam of the fixed bayonets of those who carried them, but saw that one group of half a dozen men

kept together, looking as if they had baggage horses with them.

A little further on came the word—"Files left!" and as I reined left I saw that we had cleared the flank of the koppies, saw that a broad flat separated it from a long black koppie that ran along on our new right, and by the first whitening and yellowing of the east saw that the flat near the foot of our koppie was strung with ghostly waggons and Cape carts, while all the rest of the space was full of horses feeding.

"Halt!"—We halted, a line of men in single file, along the bushes, and the colour of man and bush all one to any peering eye. And, the instant that we halted, the group of men with the three led horses went forward to the head of the troop and a little way out to the right, the doctor and I following till we saw that the three horses were unbroken colts, and that the one pack-horse behind them carried three rattling rawhides, bent double.

The Captain and the serjeant-major jumped down to help. There was a minute's hurried scuffle, and then the three maddened colts were tearing across the flat like nightmare steeds to the horses there, each with a bounding, rattling, swooping rawhide tied to his long tail, driving him to a frenzy that went headlong into anything in the way.

In that same moment the Captain and the others were in the saddle and back into the line of the troop again. "Now, gentlemen," cried the Captain, laying his carbine and bayonet into the grasp of his bridle-hand, across his horse's crest, and drawing his Colt's six-shooter—"keep your line after me and shoot into the laager, shoot and yell like all hell, as you pass and come again. Canter!"—And away he went at a hand-gallop.

Away went the thirty after him, but not a shot or a yell was heard till he himself, level with the first waggon, burst into a roar of "Hands up," threw out his right arm, and fired. Forward stooped every man at that, out went each right arm, in went every spur, and up went every voice in one wild yell. The thing was begun.

The horses on the flat, stampeding in frenzy from the colts, were rushing madly into the laager, falling over the chained oxen, crashing through tents and against Cape carts and waggons, and in the midst of that tornado of wild horses came this hail of bullets, and this roar of "Hands up!" to thicken the pandemonium, and all with that first flash of clear daylight which is so chill and eerie.

The doctor and I, following, saw the full effect of it. Kaffirs leaped to their feet and fled across the flat like deer. Some long-legged Burghers almost distanced them in going; some stood up with their hands above their heads in the first flash of sunlight, some few, very few, first fired a shot or two and then dashed into the koppie, the moment the last of us had passed. "The thing's done!" shouted the doctor to me. "The surprise has won. And hear ye! That's the three boys up the koppie from the other sides with their troops. There's a row for ye!"

It was a row: a very Bedlam, nay, an Inferno; but, as the Captain led the line back, he changed to the other side of the waggons, shouting to the men that were standing up, and to those lying hiding, "Up the koppie with you! Leave your rifles! *Maak gauw!*"

Every man that followed was yelling the same thing, save that some yelled the whole in the Taal, and save that the serjeant-major and a grim half-dozen jumped down afoot, and with rifle and bayonet began to prod out the hidiers and goad on the laggards, helped by the mounted men.

In less than five minutes from the first shot the whole laager was clear of men, even our own men, save the serjeant-major and his party, who were busy setting fire to the waggons.

Few Burghers had been hit, and none of our men. Only one Burgher was dead, and the rest were all able to struggle up the koppie, with the strong help of the unwounded ones. The few Kaffirs found hiding under the waggons loosed the lunging oxen and drove those up the slope also. In less than ten minutes from the turning loose of the colts the last of the squadron was up on the koppie, including Mr. Glentie and his two guns, while

on one side the laager was burning and on the other the patch of Kaffir corn. "There's the two smoke-fires we were to build to show where we are," said the doctor grimly.

Then in another breath he added exultingly: "Do ye see the value of old hands, old Irregulars, now? D'ye see how clean the surprise was? If the Burghers had been three times as many in that little camp, they still had not the ghost of a chance against such a clean surprise as that: not the shadow of a shade of a chance."

CHAPTER XXII

OF HOW THE GIRL OF THE COMMANDO RODE OUT OF THE KOPPIE,
AND OF—BUT READ THE CHAPTER

AS we reached the top of the koppie, here came Mr. Mansel to report to the Captain. "No man killed, sir, and only four wounded—one badly," he said casually. "The Burghers were all running over to your side to see what that row was, and so we had them, and we slapped a few rounds into them and they chucked up. There's a couple of them killed and a few wounded, but they weren't many, all told. There seems only about seventy or so, even with those you drove up from the laager."

Mr. McHoy, however, had a supplementary piece of intelligence which was to prove of importance. "When we were all right up here, I looked back, and there's a sort of triple koppie yonder, about nine hundred yards away to the south-west, and a gang of Burghers, about a hundred, were running out of it, all legs and arms to catch their horses that were snorting there in the open, and so I slapped a couple of volleys into them, and stampeded the men back to cover, and the horses over to that long ridge over to the east there."

"That's fine !" said the Captain instantly. "Now, Mr. McHoy, you keep that end of the position with your troop, and watch those Burghers in that triple koppie. So long as they have no horses they'll have no chance to get away when the column comes up. The instant you see any one of them trying to get across to that ridge on the east, after the horses, you leave all else and flatten that man out. Turn every rifle on him till

you've plugged him. They must not get those horses back: don't forget."

"Right! I'm off now," answered Mr. McHoy, and away he went.

The Captain spoke again. "McHoy holds the south side, and the serjeant-major this east side above the laager. The hot side will be the north and north-east, for there the ground gives good cover if they're going to try and retake the koppie. Mr. Mansel, you hold the north-east corner, and you, Mr. Kingstone, take the north front—it's pretty narrow—and have half a dozen men refused on your left to watch the open flat on the west, Mr. Glentie! one gun with Mr. Kingstone and one with Mr. Mansel—I'm going there now myself."

I am sorry to say that I stood and listened to this till it was finished, whereas the doctor had waited for nothing, but had gone straight to the wounded. Shamefacedly I followed him, noticing, however, as I went, that our koppie was a longish one running north and south, more oval than oblong, or rather more like an oblong with flattened corners. Its upper crust, some thirty yards thick, was ironstone boulders, but with quite a depression over most of its upper surface, deep enough to give cover for the horses and prisoners.

Into that depression the wounded had been carried, so that while we worked at them (I helping the doctor and his corporal, who was a famous dresser, and had ridden with Mr. Mansel's troop), we could not see what was happening, though we heard the rifle fire, and the sounds of the bullets, grow to a din that seemed to deafen even thought, and by the time we had ended with the original wounded there was more than one new case limping in to be dressed. Then came a pressing call from Mr. McHoy to come and see to a corporal, who was too badly hit to be carried to us.

As we rose out of the depression on to the high level, I saw that our koppie would have been a stronger position but that a broader koppie lay just north of it, full of the enemy, at no farther range than eight hundred yards, while all along the east, a thousand yards away, the long main ridge ran on south, so far

beyond our koppie that the Boers could get well along it and slant the bullets into us from there, almost as if they flanked us. Each of our troops, in fact, had to have cover from behind or flank as well as in front, for the fire of the horseless Burghers in the triple koppie counted also, in spite of their being at a much lower level.

When we had finished dressing the corporal, it still was a case which the doctor must watch for a few minutes, and here came the Lieutenant to ask after his under officer. "Oh, he'll get over this and be as bad as ever again," quoth the doctor cheerily. "And what's happening here on this front, McHoy?"

"The devil's happening," answered the Canadian in supreme disgust. "You know what Old Fireproof said about flattening every beggar that tried to go out of these triple koppies after their horses? Well, I'd hardly got back here before man after man began to try it. They didn't try the straight line across our front: they went back out of their koppies so as to swing far out and go round, thinking we couldn't hit them that way. But their koppies are so low—look at them yonder—that we can get a fair sweep at them within fourteen hundred yards, and it's just for such cases that Old Fireproof's always training the fellows to volley-firing at long ranges.

"Your marksmen and your independent firing won't bag a running man at fourteen hundred, but a troop of fair shots, firing clean volleys, will get him twice out of ten, and the other eight times they'll come so close they'll tear all the pluck off him and make him hunt for cover. 'Independent firing at masses; volleys at single men,' says Old Fireproof; and he's right.

"It was right this time, anyway, for some of them we flattened out, and some we hazed 'em back again, till I began to think that little lot was to be our meat at the finish, for the column must soon be here.

"But that's where this dashed girl came in. You may always guess pretty well how things are going to turn out till a girl comes on, and then you just by gum can't. Same here, for out from that triple koppie, out from by that big camel-thorn tree

there, rode that girl, not going back and trying to swing far out, but heading straight across our front here, a bee-line for where their horses had gone—yonder's the spot; by that patch of brush. There must be a poort through the ridge there.

"Well, when she first broke cover one or two of the fellows fired at her before they saw it was a woman, but then the whole troop broke into a yell like mad. 'Don't shoot! Don't shoot! It's a woman! It's the girl! the girl!' And they lifted their muzzles and lay and watched her go. 'There she goes! by God!' they chorussed.

"Well, gentlemen, what price me? My orders were to prevent just that very thing. I had to do something. 'Come, boys,' I said, 'we've got to stop her. Shoot now.'

"And then—but what's the use of humming and hawing! I had to fire too, or they wouldn't, and we were all so dead scared of hitting her by mistake, that we fired so high and wide that I reckon she'd never guess we were shooting at her at all. Gash! but I was mad at having to fail like that, in spite of myself. It's taken all the fizz out of the champagne for me. And yonder she's gone through that poort, and next thing I expect she'll be back with enough dashed horses to pack off the three koppies themselves, let alone the Burghers in them. I've sent him word: he'll be wild enough, but what's a fellow to do when a girl comes on the board!"

"Enjoy it, my boy! enjoy it!" cried the doctor. "Faith! there'll be plenty of fights for us to win on other days, if she beats us in this, but there's not plenty of girls like this one. Give her the floor, and while you watch her ye can thank God He made her to put some interest into one day for us."

"Rot! That's not war," retorted the Lieutenant.

"And isn't it Old Fireproof himself that calls this whole affair 'The great South African picnic'—not war?" returned the doctor smoothly. "But hear that row from the ridge yonder: the girl must be coming back, and they're trying to make it too thick for us to look over and see. She'll have to come soon

if she's coming at all, for the column must be near enough for them to see it. Phew! they must have seen it; hear the bullets!"

Assuredly the fire was swelling hotter, until it was so hot that it seemed nothing could show its head and live in it. The enemy had made three attempts to rush the other end of the position, attempts that had needed all that men could do to beat them back, and each attempt had been heralded by just such a fury of fire as this. Were they going to try this end now?

"Keep cover, boys," Mr. McHoy was calling, in a most fatherly manner, when suddenly half a dozen voices yelled out, "Yonder she comes! See her!"

"Faith, yes!" corroborated the Doctor easily, and from a chink between two boulders I looked out as eager as any, and saw that it was even so. Yonder, out by the bushes where the poort must be, surged a herd of loose horses, eight or ten men shambucking and yelling them on, and the girl commanding and ruling all.

The poort was full two-thirds of a mile away, but instead of making the nearest line for the triple koppie they headed straight for us.

"Now what in h——l is that for?" cried the Lieutenant. "Boys, hold your fire a minute till we see what's the game."

And, "Faith, that's queer now," the Doctor was saying, when suddenly there broke a sound of headlong hoofs on the stones behind, and a great shout, the Captain's, of "Shoot those horses! Shoot them! Turn them! Turn them! They're being pushed this way so when we do turn them they'll still slant into the triple kop. Shoot! Shoot now!"

"Gash! I never thought of that," cried Mr. McHoy frankly. "Shoot like hell, fellows! Here, you, you're shooting high!" And away he stooped along his line to correct any shooting that needed it.

All our line was shooting fast, though with none of the wild blind flurry I remembered in the men of a certain other column, and I felt that I must look round at the Captain. He was here

from beating back the three attempts on the other end of the kop, and now, in spite of all the splashing hail of bullets, here he was standing, craned forward, watching the horses yonder and the men here, with a face that straightway made me one with his men in believing that shot nor ball was ever fired that could hit him or turn him. It was not alone the face thrust forward; it was not alone the face set like steel; it was not alone the glittering eyes in the face; it was more: it was the light that seemed to be as a thin flame burning in his whole countenance, like an ecstasy of dominance, a passion to win: a passion to refuse to be beaten: an utter concentration on being master of all this hurly, lord of all that stood against him: master! master! the unbeaten! the unbeatable!—but the doctor saw me looking, and he crowned the whole. “Ah,” he said, speaking as low as could be heard in that forging din, “I’d give a month’s pay to see the Devil himself step up to him now, dragging the wide red mouth of Hell behind him and bidding him in. Just to see Old Fireproof then; to see him let one glance tell him who this was at his elbow, and what this was behind him, and then to see the one little backhander on the mouth with which he’d sweep the trumpery Devil into his foolish Hell—it would be worth ninepence to see. Ye may fall out with him fifty times for his stiffneckedness, but once ye’ve seen him in this sort of minute ye know he’s right. But look now: those horses are still coming on. Did ye ever think ye could throw so many bullets at such a mass and hit so wondrous few?”

“Our fire seems nothing to them,” I said.

“There’s a bigger row than ours from the ridge on their flank,” said the doctor, “and the biggest row of all is the men that’s driving them, shooting and yelling and shambucking like mad. That’s the nearest thing, and so that’s the thing they’re obeying: just like common human nature.”

I was watching the girl, where she kept charging round from man to man, and every man worked more furiously still as she left him. “That girl’s doing it!” shouted Mr. McHoy to the Captain.

“Then shoot her!” burst forth the Captain. “If she meddles

with men let her be used like one. Shoot her now! The Empire's work must be done. Shoot!"

His words came out like the pitiless smack of guns in action. There was no mistaking his terrible determination. But there was no time for speculation; the horses had come far enough and were being turned to slant into the triple koppie.

As they swung, however, four of the Boers driving them happened to come together in a clump for just one half-minute. The men saw it, and by mere instinct the whole line closed its fire on just those four and dropped them, almost as if one bullet had slain the four. "That's luck for ye!" cried the doctor. "Now see the horses break away through that gap!"

He was right. The four had been on the far side, and when they dropped they left half that flank of the herd open. The horses there simply turned, and, heads down and tails up, went straight for the open feldt to the south, along the flat between the ridge and the triple koppie. "They've lost!" I said aloud, for at that ill turn the rest of the Boers just rode for cover in the koppies, as straight and as fast as they could ride.

"Has she?" quoth the doctor, and truly the girl had not given up like the men. While they rode for cover she dashed straight for the lead of the horses, to head them round again. "Shoot her! Shoot her!" came that terrible shout from the Captain again, and—"See every man pumping away for the dear life to miss her," said the doctor in my ear again.

"Ah," he went on in the same breath. "He's guessed what's up. He's for trying a shot himself--and he's the best I ever saw."

While I listened, I was aware of the Captain striding forward in front of the men, and sitting down with his back to a stone--the stone at his back, not at his breast. He sat down to fire as carefully as I had seen him sit to shoot in the match of yesterday, when he seemed unable to miss, and I felt my bones cringe for the girl as I watched her.

All the men seemed of the same mind, for all the line ceased firing, waiting upon the Captain's shot. Yet that shot missed, and to this day I am persuaded that we all breathed with relief

at that. But the Captain said no word : all he did was to bring his rifle up again, sight, and fire.

This time he must have hit the horse, for it lunged, reared, plunged, and then tore away with the girl, fairly bolting at the horses and scaring them as it rushed for the triple koppie, until, for a fresh marvel, they fled before the wounded horse and rushed straight into the koppie themselves. "Beaten! She's beaten us! We've lost that koppieful!" cried the Captain rousingly. "But give her a cheer, gentlemen; give her your best! She's the best man yonder: she's splendid!"

I can remember yet how we all cheered: it was not will, but numbers, that failed us if the cheer did not reach her.

"Come, padre," said the doctor; "let us get back to work. We've seen the thing of the day: the rest is just trimmings."

And the doctor was right, for the rest of the affair is as well set down in Mr. McHoy's summing up as any. He was telling it to a friend of another column. "She sure enough had beaten us, for the column came up and ramped in, and there was a fine five minutes, with guns, and machine-guns, and charging, and shooting. But Alterman's commando had made Vanrooi too strong for slipping a sack over him at one dive, and what with that, and the strength of the position, the Boers got away, and all we got was a hundred and seventy odd of all sorts; killed, wounded, and prisoners; including D Squadron's private bag.

"You see, the column might have bagged the Boers; at any rate it had a sporting chance; if the girl hadn't brought horses for those men. For as soon as they'd saddled they rode out in a cloud—there must have been two hundred of them—going like blazes for about three miles straight south, and then they swung east, across the big ridge, in time to take the column on the flank and keep it busy long enough to let Vanrooi and Alterman change their job and get everything inspanned and trekking.

"But one thing we found out, and that was why the girl rode straight across, when she went for the horses, whereas the men had tried to go round. There was a wide, deep donga, a regular

wash-out, that came through the poort and ran for three solid miles before a horse could cross it. Men afoot could across it, of course, but not a horse, and that's why they drove the horses at us too, because there wasn't time to go round and still get on the flank of the column before it got too near.

"When we saw that, all the troop began to say—'That girl's the splendid one! by G——!' and I looked at Old Fireproof, and he nodded—'That's her name,' he said, deep and strong—'Splendid is her name. He'll need to be a man that's to be husband to her. And think of the fine fighting sons she'll bear him!'"

Thus and similar the chief points of the whole affair to Mr. McHoy. My own outlook carried my eye to something wholly different. To me the chief point in the whole affair was the seeming contradiction between the Captain's words on the night march and his words in the morning fight. On the night march I had broken out with an almost prayer that no bullet might touch this girl of the commando, and he had answered as fervently, "Amen to that." Now, in the fight of this morning, the same man, speaking of the same girl, had roared on thirty men to shoot her, and when they failed had himself sat down, a prince of shots, to shoot her, though it is true that he called on the same men to give her a cheer when he had failed, and she had beaten him. Only a man as utterly fearless morally as physically could have done that.

CHAPTER XXIII

OF THE FINE PRESIDENT OF THE HELP TO THE HOSPITALS SOCIETY,
AND OF HOW SHE SET ALL MOOIBURG AGOG, WITH FURTHER,
OF HOW SHE SAT IN THE DOOR OF MY TENT AT SUNSET AND
HEARD WHAT I SHOULD NOT HAVE TOLD

WHEN I returned from my visit to Rostron's column—I came in with the wounded—it was to find all Mooiburg agog with a rare enough sensation, namely, the advent of "The President of the Help to the Hospitals Society," to set down the sensation in the full terms of the official designation of the lady who caused it.

In truth, I had not gone half-way through one day's round of duties before I had heard of her in a dozen different tales, so that when, in the early afternoon, walking down the centre street of the town, I saw coming one who seemed to have stepped straight out of a grand garden-party in the height of the London season, I had no hesitation in saying to myself at once, "Ah, yonder she comes"—just as the men two days ago had cried of the girl of the commando. Nor had I any hesitation in adding the comment, "They are right."

By that comment it will be guessed that the point most insisted upon, in all the stories I had heard, was the artistic perfection of her apparel, not any flaunting glory of flounce or colour, but perfectness of material, chosen to perfection, perfectly planned and the cut perfect. Moreover, over all else the tales insisted on the distinguished way she carried her apparel, the acme of training or of instinct being radiant in every movement. And both these things, her dress and the way she

carried it, were patent while she was yet far off, though, as she came nearer, my unfortunate difficulty in looking handsome ladies in the eyes prevented me from looking whether there were any additional qualities in her face.

Also, the difficulty which I have just mentioned, as besetting me beyond bounds at the approach of fine ladies, caused me to keep my eyes upon the ground as she passed, so that even of her dress I can only say that the skirt seemed made of a wonderful and intricate grey lace, of a pattern that reminded me of the valuable Paisley shawl which my aunt sometimes wore of a evening, when she used to walk in the garden to take me and give me an apple or a plum or a pear, when I was a boy home from school—for I ought to say that my aunt brought me up, I being one of a family too large for my parents to bring up in comfort.

And this grey lace was worn over a skirt of grey shining stuff, which may have been silk or satin, but, as I dared not look so high as the hips, so I cannot tell whether her dress was all of a piece with the skirt. Only at the hem of the skirt was a little frill sewn on, of a rucked grey lace of another pattern, and the whole hem seemed to be worn over a six-inch thickness of crinkly white cambric under-petticoats, seeming very white, and soft, and dainty, and airy, as she walked, and hiding all but her foot as high as the instep.

And I remember her shoes were of fine leather, black, and with a grey buckle bent over the instep. Indeed, looking back to my first seeing her while she was still some distance off, I believe that grey was the colour of the whole of her dress, and that only her hat and her parasol could have differed in colour, if there were any other colour about her than the one soft grey.

Only as she passed there came to me a faint, faint waft of perfume, so delicate and subtle that, having since, upon a visit to town, by chance discovered it to be on sale at an old tradesman of my aunt's, off Jermyn Street, I now always buy that particular perfume, whenever I find myself in the way of needing to make a present to any of my few lady parishioners or ac-

quaintances. And they always endorse my praise of it, saying enthusiastically that it is most charming, though I cannot say that they seem very greatly charmed with the story of how I first came to know of it, though I naturally tell it with great exactitude, especially that part of it which tells how she came and sat in my tent. For that same evening she came to me.

It came about that I had no case of men dying, or in great distress of spirit—and indeed it is wonderful how few men in hospital, even in near danger of death, ever trouble about the next world or what shall come after death—and so I was able to return to my tent while the sun was not yet set. And there in my tent I fell to writing a letter to my aunt, describing my three days with the Captain's squadron, and telling of the fight, and of the girl of the commando—in truth it is mainly from the complete series of my letters home to my aunt, from the war, that I write this account. And while I was writing, and deep in the interest of the tale I had to tell, there came an interruption before which I almost fled under the skirt of the tent.

For I looked out along the stone-bordered path which led from the hospital and there, backed by the golden glow of the sinking sun, came two figures, man and woman; he the P.M.O., or Principal Medical Officer, of the hospital, and she none other than the one of whom all the town was talking.

They were already come within thirty yards of my tent, and by the pose and gait of him I could see that the P.M.O. was in great feather with himself as he came along, but it so happened that at that particular instant she stopped and half turned towards him, her manner the easiest in the world, and offered him her hand at that high level which always makes my aunt so sarcastic.

He, poor man, was so little expecting such dismissal: he was, in fact, so well set in his conceit of himself, as doing the honours to this fine lady, that he was half a pace beyond her before he could realize the check. Down came all his high feather at once. He checked as awkwardly as if it had been I. To me his mortifica-

tion was so plain that I felt she must have dismissed him wholly without warning, suddenly changing her mind from what she had previously let him understand, and now dropping him as she might drop the scrap of paper upon which had been written the directions for finding my tent. I cannot say that I was flattered by the coming of a lady so fine that courtesy was nothing to her.

Yet—such is human nature, I suppose—she was no sooner come to my tent door, and pausing for me to come forward to be her humble servant, than I rose and made myself that humble servant she so evidently expected. “Good-evening, madame,” I said, with my best attempt at a bow—though my aunt always tells me not to be silly, I look so foolish at it, she says. But then she is no great believer in her nephew.—Then I added, “Is it anything I can do for you?”

“... If you are the chaplain of the hospital?” she answered, with such an air and manner of interest, as if I were the one man she had crossed the world to see, that I fear I straightway set down the P.M.O. as too dense to have seen the hints she must have given him, till he had left her no alternative but to dismiss him downrightly. More than that, her tone and manner so astonished me, by their difference from what I had expected, that they electrified me into lifting my eyes to hers.

But there again, her eyes were so wonderfully blue, and were looking at me with such interest, that my own dropped at once, while I clean forgot what it was she had said or asked me, and to cover my flurry I went back a step or two to usher her into the tent, at the same time lifting my camp chair forward and saying, “May I set a chair for you?”

“Here!” she directed, indicating the spot just inside the thrown-back flap of the tent. “I can see the sunset from there, and the sunsets are the great glory this country has.”

“Ah, the sunsets,” I answered straightway, my confusion not less but more, as the faint perfume of her garments came to my breath and the distinction of her manner stirred my blood. And, all to stick fast to some familiar point in the midst of this new

shiftiness in my senses, I broke out with the doctor's quotation of the Captain's description of a sunset. "Ah, these sunsets," I repeated, "these sunsets that have—as a friend of mine once said—every colour there is in them, from apple-green and gold-dust to the Flames of the Sword of God."

"Ah," she said quickly, "I once had a friend who could say things like that. He'd knocked about a good deal, as he used to put it, and he used to say that the more desert the country the more splendid the sunsets. And then, in the real desert there was the after-glow."

I could almost have thanked her aloud for possessing such a friend, since he was so like to my friend that it gave me something to talk about which would interest her. "Ah," I said, "my friend is just like that. He has knocked about, too, as he also puts it—I suppose they all use much the same phrasing of speech, since they talk it to one another. But this sunset was one in Bloemfontein, a day or two before the general advance north to Pretoria. He was sick with fever—he was a scout then—and my friend the doctor had taken him to the house of a widow there, where it was very cool and quiet, and where there was a garden to look out into, and the sunset was in the sky beyond, and the woman turned back on the threshold."

My eagerness and my confusion may be guessed both from the way I misquoted the particular sunset, and from the unwarrantable way in which I went on to mention the woman. I had no sooner done it than I felt it, but I felt, too, that the presence of this woman was the one great fact at that moment, and I turned and set my camp chair in the opposite corner to her, where it was somewhat dark, my tent being square and of green canvas, with a thick yellow lining.

When I had sat down thus, I with my face in the shadow and she with hers in the golden light of the sunset, I felt somewhat bolder and made shift to glance at her face to gather what she thought of my confusion. But whether it were that she was too well trained to show surprise, or whether she had shown it and I had missed it by being busy with the stool, or whether indeed she felt any surprise at all I do not know. All that I can vouch

for is that her eyes shone very bright, and that she presently answered me with a little smile, speaking quickly, "... and the woman turned back on the threshold—Well, women do do some very funny things. But what woman was it? Was it some woman in love with him?"

"No, this was the maid of the woman who loved him. That woman did not come till next day," I answered, going on from bad to worse, and feeling it also, though seemingly unable to draw back.

"And did she turn back on the threshold, too?" she pursued, and I had such a suspicion that she was secretly laughing at the story, or at me, that I could not lift my eyes to her face.

"No," I blundered on, feeling my delinquency more keenly at each fresh step in it. "She went on over the threshold to his bedside—he had taken a powerful sleeping-draught just before—and when she got so far as that she began to revile him, and lifted her stick as if she would strike him as he lay helpless, but her maid snatched the stick, and broke it, and flung it away, and turned her out."

I looked up as I ended, and desperately glanced at her to see what she was making of me. But the red flame of sunset was on her face, making it so red, and blazing so in her eyes, as I thought, that she was lifting her handkerchief to her eyes and face to shield them.

"That sounds a rather sensational story," she answered. "Quite like attending a Divorce case. But, if the man was sleeping, who saw all this? You say the man had a fever—didn't he rather imagine it all?"

I was into it up to the neck by now, and it also occurred to me that it was no great matter, so long as I mentioned no names. Therefore I answered somewhat more boldly. "Nay, so far from having imagined it, he knows nothing about it. It was the doctor who saw the woman who turned back, and the widow of the house who saw the one who wished to strike him with a stick. So far as I remember, he does not know what happened at all," I ended, trying my best to remember whether the widow had or had not told him anything.

"Oh, then it is all right, I suppose," answered my visitor from the folds of her handkerchief. "And I suppose it all ended in the usual way—they married and lived happy ever after."

"I am afraid not," I answered. "You see, she met him as he was riding out to rejoin his regiment, and there were some bitter things said, and they parted in anger."

"Still, anger passes and love remains, as the bard says," replied the lady out of the depths of her handkerchief.

"Anger passes, yes," I replied. "But does love remain? I do not know—And my friend is a very positive man."

"Has he said that love no longer remains?" asked the lady very quietly.

"He has never spoken about the matter, one way or another; not a word of any sort, either good or bad. Even to the doctor, who was present at the quarrel in the street, and tried to make him turn back to the lady, he has never mentioned her name," I answered.

"And what does the doctor think about it?" she asked, speaking quickly again, as women do in following out a love-story.

"He does not know what to think," I answered, "except that, a while ago, happening to see the Captain's kit laid out in the sun to dry, he saw one single little book in it. Wanting something to read, he borrowed the book from the Captain's servant, and found that it opened of itself at a poem so remarkable, as being the Captain's favourite, that he copied it out."

There I paused, wondering whether it would be wise to go on to say that I myself had a copy of the poem. But she spoke quickly. "So your friend is a captain then? Well, now you must introduce us. Remember what the young lady said in the last new play—'I just dote on captains.' Besides, he was a scout, and therefore he must be an Irregular, and Irregulars are quite the latest thing out. And what did the doctor think after reading the poem?"

"He didn't know, quite, what to think," I answered.

"And what did you think, after the doctor quoted the poem to you?" she went on persistently.

"I do not quite know what to think, either," I replied. "Sometimes I think I know, and then I have great doubts."

"Still, that is only two of you, and both of you in doubt. Now recite the poem to me and I'll judge." She did not ask or urge me to recite; she commanded, and I obeyed, mentally resolving, however, never to be left alone with fine ladies again.

By this time the sun had set, so that the hour was peculiarly appropriate, nay, it was the very hour at which the poem must have been written by its author, as may be gathered from its opening line. Yet it was a breath or two before I could summon up sufficient courage to begin, and even then began desperately, remembering keenly to what little advantage a man appears when reciting sentimental poetry, unless he be a man of some gifts himself. Here, however, is the poem:

"Eve is beginning to gloom,
Dusk folds the feet of the hills,
Sombre the far mountains loom,
Darkness oblivion distils.

"Why dost thou moan, O my heart?
Why art thou sorrowing yet?
Why dost thou still walk apart?
Is it not time to forget?

"Day's fevered banners are furled,
Night broods in balm o'er its scars;
Subtly the rim of the world
Fills with the peace of the stars.

"Let the past fade; it is o'er;
Cover its hearth in thy breast;
Fretting the quiet no more,
Turn thou and cloak thee to rest."

Here I broke off to explain. "Then the man's heart answers him," I said, and so continued the recital.

"Why should I sleep that night falls?
 What part have I in its peace?
 Darkness, to dreaming that calls,
 Yieldeth my pain but increase.

"Tired Earth may sleep; well she knows
 Darkness hath dawn in its train,
 Waking her, calm as a rose,
 Bringing Day's vintage again.

"Give me again what is lost:
 Love's broken promises keep:
 Cancel what knowledge hath cost—
 Then, yea, then fain will I sleep."

"It is the last verse which seems to close the door," I said.
 "'Cancel what knowledge hath cost'—that seems so final."

She seemed lost in thought for a minute after I ended, and when she spoke it was with a distinct unclosing of the lips and moistening them before a tone came. "Ah, does it?" she said. And then, after a pause, she added, "Well, it has grown so dark that I am afraid I must ask you if you would mind escorting me to my quarters. You see, I am the President of the Help to the Hospitals Society, and one must pass the scrutiny of the chaplains as well as the P.M.O.s. I am afraid I have not shown to any great advantage, gossiping about people's love-affairs, but you must remember that I am a woman, too, and women are always interested in love-affairs. And again, you may find that I improve upon acquaintance, and that next time I shall be all the business woman and none of the gossipier."

"Madame," I began to protest. But she cut me short. "No, no; I know," she demurred, smiling tiredly. "Don't you make pretty speeches too. All the rest do that, and I'm tired of it. My friend that I spoke of never made pretty speeches. He used to speak as direct as a cavalry charge."

"Why," I said, astonished again, "that is just like my friend again."

"Yes, I think I shall like your friend immensely. You mustn't forget to introduce us."

"I won't," I said warmly, and only when I had said it did I see what an impossible thing I had said. Moreover, the perplexity in which that rash promise landed me kept me silent by her side the whole way to her quarters.

As to herself, she never said one word as we went, or seemed conscious of my existence even, till we came to her door. There she said, "Good-night. Thank you."

That was all, and I have no defence to offer for my conduct, save such as the reader may make for me.

CHAPTER XXIV

OF THE GIRL OF THE COMMANDO, AND THE GIRL OF THE ROSE

ALL that next day I did not see anything of my fair visitor of the evening, and quite by chance I heard that she and the lady secretary of the same society had taken luncheon with the General at Headquarters, riding round the garrison defences with him afterwards.

The day itself was far from pleasant to me, for I was sore put to it in my mind with wonder at my gross breach of a clergyman's trust, in telling to another person that which I should never have heard had I not been the chaplain. I could only plead that I had never been used to smart ladies, having always fought shy of them since one day at the Dean's garden-party, where—but that is no part of this story.

However, when night was dark across the feldt, and when indeed I was expecting to hear the last post sounding, there came a visitor to me again to cheer me up with another breath of the world which might fail of its object to-day, but which always rose again to-morrow to a fresh attempt as stubborn as before. Need I say what world that was, for what world in the world was it but the world of Rostron's Column?

I was sitting in my tent, finishing the letter to my aunt which I had begun yesterday—but which I was not to finish even to-morrow or the next day, by reason of new long chapters which had to be added to it—when I heard the cheery, familiar voice of Lieutenant Mansel at my tent door, calling merrily, "Now, Mr. Allen, where's that sable man and brother of yours, to take my horse and get things into trim for your guest?"

Down went my pen and out I stepped. "Light down! light down!" I cried. "My servant lies there by my Cape cart, but I will wait upon such a guest as you."

"You will not," quoth Mr. Mansel cheerily. "Ho, Adonis!" (but he used the Boer form of the word, which is Ahdoonse) "Out you roll, and up you get! Come now, upstand!" and with that he rode his horse so nearly upon the Kaffir's blanket that the huddled figure beneath leaped upright as quick as a Jack-in-the-box, the first time I had ever known him to rise for any persuasion, after once rolling himself in his multifarious rugs and rags to sleep.

"Ah, I thought the beggar would move," spoke Mr. Mansel. "Mr. Allen, when the column comes in I'll swap you a decent nigger for this one: this one will obey me and that one will obey you. I've trained him." And with the word he dismounted and threw his rein to the Kaffir, who moved swifter to wait upon that horse than he had ever done to wait on me.

As soon as my friend stepped inside I hastened to lift the lid of a box which had arrived that very day, sent by my aunt, and full of things that seemed almost sinful luxury in that place. "Gee-whiz!" exclaimed my friend. "Cakes and ale with a vengeance! You'd better not make me an honorary member of this mess, or they won't get me out on trek again till that box is empty. Hams and jams, and smoked and potted meats, and fish and cakes, and duffs and stuffs, and even elderberry wine for a cold! Tell your aunt if I ever come home to within fifty miles of her place I'm going to burgle her pantry, and I shall bring a full-sized sack with me, too."

In such merry wise did the evening begin for us, and I asked for no news of man or column till he was sitting on the ground, as he best loved, with food before him and coffee at his elbow. Only then did I say, "I hope that all is well with the column."

"Ah, the column's been up to the neck in luck," he replied joyously. "It's in the matter of the same commando; the girl's. But I'll tell you the tale as soon as I've finished. Meanwhile I can tell you that Kingstone's had the luckiest shave he'll ever

have. Another hair's-breadth and he'd have been a deader. As it is, it's a stiffish wound, but he'll be all right again inside a month or two. Of course, he's as mad as a wet hen at being out of it for two months, but the beggar oughtn't to growl if it was three, for he's never done a single turn of hospital yet, all the time he's been here at the war. Some sweeps want all the jam, as I told him."

Accustomed as I seemed to be by this time to D Squadron's way of looking at things, I yet could not help feeling greatly concerned at hearing of Mr. Kingstone's wound. He had all the dash of the typical Australian, and so the Captain was wont to shackle him a little with instructions against the criminality of—what think you? Nay, you'll never guess that it was recklessness! And here I should say that it was a cardinal point with Old Fireproof that he himself was the most cautious of all commanders. And, truly enough, one of his favourite sayings was that a scout, a Captain, or a General, acting independently, should alike follow one golden rule, "First take all precautions and then take all risks—to win." But when he had finished giving you chapter and verse for his own cautiousness, you were left gasping at his point of view as to what was danger and what was safety.

However, to leave all that, and also to leave my concern for Mr. Kingstone, and to come to Mr. Mansel and the tale he was going to tell me, I may say that I insisted that he should fill his pipe from my aunt's special mixture, which she had named "The Long Clay Mixture," and I had named "Old D's Dessert," before he began.

"Well," he admitted, "this Dessert tobacco ought to make a man tell his tale mellowly, if it's any tale worth telling at all. And this one is, for it's about the Girl of the Commando and about the Girl of the Rose."

I could not forbear an exclamation of pleasure and surprise. "The Girl of the Rose too! Please let me hear the tale at once. It sounds as if we were in the very thick of thick romance."

"We are," returned Lieutenant Mansel. "You bet we are.

But, to begin this tale where it starts, you'll remember my telling you of the Girl of the Rose, and you'll remember, too, that when you left us the other day, we were all of us still busy sleeping, any chance we got, so as to make up for the night march to that fight where the girl did us out of winning.

"Well, and yesterday, as we were trekking along, our information suddenly said Boers, and the Girl's Commando at that, halted in that spread of koppies out yonder, east of the big Spitz Kop. Old Rostron checked, looked at the big Spitz Kop, looked at Old Fireproof and Old Fireproof nodded, sized it all up all round, thought of his bag and thought of his luck, and thought he'd try again.

"This time the problem wasn't any simpler. They were lying in fifties and hundreds, each in some little strong spot within easy range of the other, so that we hadn't nearly men enough to surround the whole position, and, if we rushed any koppie blind, we'd be likely to lose more of us than we'd get of them. That's what the Brigade-Major said, but Old Fireproof countered him straight. "Yes," he said, "but it's like the old attempts to conquer Wales. As Gerald said, for every man we lose we can put another in his place. Every man the Burghers lose they're one man less for good. That's what this war is now."

"So Old Rostron thought, and he nodded, and we got ready for the job, for it was to be another night march and strike at dawn.

"Well, you know, Old Fireproof would die of disgrace if he wasn't told off to the hottest corner. And, anyway, if the thing is being done by guess and luck, his corner's sure to be the hot corner, for he knows by instinct which is the top move of the game, and he makes it. Besides that, there's his luck, and between the two—luck and instinct—he got right at the heart of the commando this time, too.

"I needn't tell you anything about the night march, after the other night, but it was blue blazes when the dawn came, if you don't mind. You know the colour of the rifle-flashes with this cordite, red in the dark, blue in the first faintest grey of dawn

and pale primrose as it gets all but broad daylight? Well, we had all three in this little scene, but chiefly we had the blue, like the electric light gone mad, and spurting from every boulder on the koppie side.

"But we'd got fast to them, and it was a big broad koppie, all bush and boulders, and to get fast to them at all is what Old Fireproof calls half the battle, while the other half with him is what you saw the other morning—roaring, shooting, smashing, fighting, like an iron man, till it's done.

"And, sir, you know, after the other morning, that that's what counts in a fight at arm's-length in the dawn, when over all the whirling hellion din, in the half dark, you're hearing some furious voice yelling, 'Come on! Come on! Shoot! Fight! Kill! Come on!' as if a devil that couldn't be killed were roaring you into the thick of it. It snatches the cover off something inside you, and you flare into a blind, mad, shouting rage, and feel as if you could smash down the furnaces of hell itself and stamp on the bricks and cinders of it. It's—no, I don't know what it is. It's there—that's all I know.

"But this time, in spite of all that, it seemed for awhile as if we might not win, and as though we might be hung up after all. Vanrooi himself was there, and more, as we found out afterwards when we saw why they'd been so stiff. By Jove! stiff was the word, but you know how the fellows believe in Old Steelribs, Old Fireproof as they call him, and they made such a rearing, roaring, tearing rage of it, every man in front roaring 'Hands up!' and firing as he climbed, and every man behind roaring and cursing because he couldn't get in front, that it was no use, they would win. Steam-rollers wouldn't have stopped them: up they went.

"Now I was one of those doing the roaring behind, for some fathead's horse had trampled my instep when I leaped down to lead up the slope, and I simply could not go fast enough to keep up. Gash! I was mad! But just when I got maddest; just when I'd got so near the top that I saw I never should reach the front before it ended; something happened that shut my mouth in sheer astonishment.

"But you'd never guess what it was that astonished me ; not you ; for out from a tent behind some trees under a ledge of cliff on the right, just behind the first rush of the men ; out stepped the white-clad figure of a splendid girl ; the girl ; the girl of the commando, the girl of the other day.

"And more ; she was more ; for in her first step, as her bare white feet stepped from stone to stone, I knew all that white grace and shapeliness again—it was the girl of the lamp, the girl of the rose, the girl of that night so long ago when Old Fireproof was so weary, body and soul together, and we were out scouting and he stepped inside the wrong house.

"She had no rose this time, and what she wore was some sort of dressing-gown, I suppose, but it was soft, and white, and loose, and her hair was hanging just like it was that night, with the same broad band of black velvet round her forehead to keep it in place—that must be her way of doing it for the night, I suppose.

"She stood for just one shrinking breath, seeing everything, and then she turned and began to step up the slope, elbow to elbow as you may say, among the men. She seemed to be going up with them to see what the end would be ; and she did see, for just then the top was won, Vanrooi, and the Boers that hadn't been flattened out or been able to get away, were standing with their hands up, and our fellows with wounds were dropping themselves down here and there—but you know how the show stops and breaks up at that instant.

"Still, she kept on, and so did I, for I wanted above all things to see what would happen when those two met. And as she went a buzz began to run amongst the fellows—'The girl ! The girl !' so that at last Old Fireproof heard it and looked round, just as she came on the level with him, perhaps six feet away ; and just as the first flush of the sun gilded the white of her robe, as well as the dusk of her hair. And still, through all the fear, and the trouble, and the horror in her face, her mouth was softness yet, her look was sweetness yet, though softness and sweetness terrified.

"He was quickest of the two to remember, for he's a mar.

that never forgets. His face was still grey and red in patches, and his body was still stooping and heaving to catch his breath again after the struggle, but as soon as his eye saw her his body straightened up, his left hand went out and dropped the carbine—for its bayonet was red—behind him, and his right hand went up and saluted her.

“And while I watched, and while he looked, we saw her eyes change. Her face changed, too; her whole body changed its poise, and the softest, slowest blush that ever showed the sweetness of a girl’s mind came into her face as she stood, with the flush of the rising sun changing the blush in her skin to rare porcelain for fineness and light.

“The red and grey went out of his face at that. All the marks of his feelings went too, and left him with what the fellows call his fifty-thousand-a-year look on, and the only word he said was, ‘Madame, I think your tent is in the trees there: let me help you down to it.’ Then he held out his hand to her, his whole manner as if she were a princess.

“She never spoke a word. I suppose her brain was going round. She just gave him her hand with a slow grace, as if this were a quiet green hillside on a June morning at home, though the rifles were rattling in the other koppies still, and wounded men were lying groaning and gasping round us there, as well as more than one that would never gasp again in this world. But she was like a girl that’s walking in a dream.

“Well, as I said, this was an ironstone koppie, all thorns and boulders, and she hadn’t put the white flash of her feet down on the brown stones twice before he looked down to see. Then the next step she took was into blood, and at the touch he seized her and drew her back. ‘No, no!’ he said—but it was half a shout—‘That’s horrible. No. Pardon me,——’ And before she, or anyone else, could guess what next, he had swung her up across his chest, high up, both his arms under her; the proper way to carry a girl; and was bearing her down in the sunlight towards the trees that hid her tent. It takes a strong man to do that, with a big fine girl like that; but you never think how strong he is till you see it; and he stepped down as

light as a stag, and not till he came to her tent door did he set her down and salute her as she passed inside, while I turned to go and see Kingstone, for they'd told me he was down.

"Well, padre, that was yesterday, at dawn. To-morrow afternoon they'll be here, and you'll see her for yourself. But now, if you don't mind, I'm dead sleepy. Excuse me if I sleep." And, with that marvellous quickness which I had before noted in his Captain, Lieutenant Mansel drew two breaths and then was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XXV

OF THE GRIEF OF THE GIRL OF THE ROSE ; OF THE TRICKS OF AN
INEFFABLE JACK-IN-OFFICE, AND OF THE FURY OF THE CAPTAIN,
THIS CHAPTER TREATS

THE column was expected in some time after noon, or rather, it was expected to draw to camp at the Faal koppies, two miles out, at that time. Its wounded, however, started early and, since the ambulances made no halt, came into the town while it was yet an hour till noon, so that I, crossing the street about my business, was cheerily accosted by my friend the doctor. "Ho, padre! The cream of the day to you. What do you think of us now we've captured this Joan of Arc?"

"Is she with you now?" I asked at once, in my eagerness forgetting the common courtesy of greeting.

"Ah no, now," railed the doctor. "D'ye think the Captain would go to so much trouble to capture her, and then let her go out of his sight before he had to? Sure, he'll bring her in as if she was the old Queen's daughter, with the whole squadron for escort of honour to her."

"I am coming to help you in with the wounded," I said to that, having no other thing to say.

"Come now ; I'll walk, then," quoth the doctor, dismounting lightly that he might walk with me. "And what's the news of this metropolitan village of yours?"

"Much the same as of any other metropolis," I answered, plucking up an attempt at wit. "The whole place is talking about a woman."

"Oh! *a* woman. Then that means that a fresh one has just fallen into the sink, and the rest haven't finished gloating over it."

"No, this is another matter quite," I said pleasantly. "This is that a woman has come, who is so far above any woman you'd ever expect to see in such a place, that no one is backbiting her, but all are singing her praises. She looks as if she'd just stepped out of Bond Street."

"Ah, is she the smartest and the handsomest woman you ever did see, padre?" demanded the doctor, half turning to me as if I had struck him.

"She is,—by far," I answered.

"Don't tell me that! Don't tell me that woman's here again—after the Captain!" went on the doctor with a rising eagerness.

"That woman?" I answered. "Surely this cannot be the heiress of Vron Aig! But I know it cannot be, for I do not believe that any man could refuse her any wish, much less refuse to marry her. She is so much the great lady, and so much—ah! there she is, in that garden, standing under the trellis with the roses on it."

The doctor looked. "Saints and devils!—and them that's betwixt and between besides," he cried quietly. "That's she! That's the one! But it's queer that she'd be here again where he is, after the way they parted—that is, unless they've made it up since by letter, and she's here to see him by arrangement. For convention would trouble her as little as it does him."

"She? Surely not the lady of the stick?" I cried, aghast at the very thought. In my horriification I stole a full look at her, and was astonished beyond measure to see her graciously recognise me with a quiet bow.

In my wonderment, as I saluted and passed on, I spoke my thoughts aloud. "She seemed very greatly subdued this morning. I hope it was not what I said to her, the evening before last."

"What, were ye trying to convert her, padre?" cried the

doctor, astonished in turn. "Surely she needs no mending?"

"I was not trying to convert her," I answered ashamedly, for all my folly rose before me now to punish me. "I was only talking of things I ought never to have repeated to anyone, much less to her. And she did not put me right, though she knew I must some day discover who she was," I added upon swift reflection.

"Oh, padre! padre! padre! don't tell me she beguiled you into telling her own love-story, as you had heard it from me?" chuckled the doctor, in huge delight.

"I am afraid I did, though not at length, but only by particular points as she questioned me," I admitted. "And I quoted the poem to her, 'Eve is beginning to gloom,' and then she said no more, but got up to go."

"Then ye've done it, padre, and it's no use regretting," returned the doctor, in huge enjoyment of the situation. "I thought she looked wiser and quieter by a lot. I suppose a year of heartbreak has taught her something. But now we two must keep our eyes open and see how the struggle goes. You don't bet, padre, you being in the Church. But if you were a betting man, then what odds would it be, and which way, between them?"

"I would rather not guess," I answered. "If he could turn his face from such a woman as that, then he must be beyond guessing at. Yet I feel sure that this time she will lift no stick towards him: she will use only repentance and pleading."

"Will she?" returned the doctor doubtingly. "I have some hesitation about that. But if she does do that, she may get him, for he can't stand much that way. However, we shall all see what we shall see, and meanwhile here's the hospital."

It took us a full hour to get all the sick and wounded comfortably into cots in the hospital pavilions, but then I wasted little time upon my mid-day meal, for I was all eagerness to ride out and meet "my" squadron, and its leader and its prisoner.

I met the column while the head of it was still some mile or

so from the camping ground at Faal koppies, but the first answer to my quick inquiry was that it was D Squadron's turn to act as rear-guard to-day, and that I should not find "my" people nearer than that.

Well, that was none too far away for my eagerness, and I put my willing horse to the gallop again with a light heart, passing, midway along the line, the dusty company of the prisoners, mostly riding on empty transport waggons, and guarded by marching infantry. But I had no time for curious looks at them; on I went, and when I had come beyond the last laggard ox-waggon I came upon my friend, the Captain, and with him none other than his captive, the Girl of the Commando, the Girl of the Rose.

And "Ah!" he said, as I reined in before him. "The very man I want to see. Madame," he went on, turning to his captive, "this is my good friend of whom I spoke, Mr. Allen, the chaplain, who will do anything he can in the way of service to you if I am not within reach."

Then to me he went on: "Mr. Allen, this is Miss Villiers, the lady who beat us so splendidly the other morning, as well as many other times besides. I know you will be only too glad to do anything you may for her."

As I lifted my cap, she turned her grave face to me, so that I clearly saw the sorrow and trouble, with the resignation, and yet the courage also, which made her face so hauntingly appealing to one's chivalry. I could not let my eyes wander to scan the details of her face, because her eyes were reading mine, and I would not hinder her examination of me, but I confess with gladness yet how proud I felt when, at the end of her searching scrutiny, a faint smile of trust came into her countenance. Then she said: "Thank you, sir. I shall be very glad to have any friend I may."

At least I think those were her words, but I dare not swear to them. For, in spite of what Mr. Mansel had told me of it, the unexpected goldenness of her voice quite startled me out of all certainty, as her tone wandered among the chords of thankings and gratefulness.

Before I had wholly recovered of my surprise, the Captain spoke again. "Mr. Allen, will you please escort Miss Villiers along a little while, till I draw the squadron in? I'll overtake you before you get to the town; but, if anything should by chance detain me, then keep straight on to the Widow Le Warn's house. Corporal Picton has gone on to ask her to take Miss Villiers as a guest for a day or two."

"Thank you," I said to him; and to the lady herself, "I shall be very glad."

If I expected my companion to be full of ready conversation, leading my tongue and picking my mind as easily as my visitor of two evenings ago, I must have been disappointed grievously. So silent she kept that, all to draw her thoughts from sadness, I cudgelled my brains desperately for some subject of conversation. •But, as I was debarred from speaking of religion, or of my friends the Captain and his men, or of the war, because each and all of these subjects must drive her thoughts back upon the tragedy of her position, I was hard put to it for something to say. And when at last I had said that the house of the Widow Le Warn had one of the pleasantest gardens in the town, I should have been stumped for any further thing to say had I not added that the roses in that garden were particularly fine.

At that mention of roses, however, she roused at once, saying that she loved roses greatly, and indeed all flowers, they were so innocent and so sweet, adding, with something like a gasp of memory, "My own garden was so full of flowers. Before winter was ended the violets met me with their fragrance long before I got to the gate, as I rode in from the feldt. And all the year there were the roses. Oh, and one bush was so splendid, and ran so riot with great red roses, that I had to go and cut baskets and baskets, full, every morning in order to let the new buds come. And they were so many I had to cut that I had not place for them all in the house, and the scent was so strong that we had to keep all the doors and windows open to keep the air from fainting in the rooms. And all the clouds of all the other flowers—oh!"

I looked at her face as she made that exclamation, and I saw that her eyes were swimming in tears.

In that sight it came upon me to say that the Captain loved a fair garden as much as any woman, but I held my tongue in time, remembering the rose the Captain had begged of her from her breast that night in her own bower, where there were "roses—roses everywhere," as Lieutenant Mansel had said.

Sorrow spoken in any voice is sorrow to hear. Chanted in that wonderful voice of hers, it went to one's blood like one's own grief, and the haunting echo of her tone as she spoke forced me to say something to distract her. "And," I said, "so many of the sweetest things in our poetry are said of the rose."

She caught her breath and held it, and in that holding of it she fought down her sorrow, and steeled herself resolute to change her mind from sadness. "Yes," she said, though that first word came out with an effort. "But are not the sweetest things of all said of it unconsciously, like the opening of that old Scots song, 'My love is like a red, red rose' ? and like Waller's 'Go, lovely rose,' and all the rest where the rose is made the simile, the comparison, or the messenger, to the woman the poet is in love with. I have never read a poem on the rose itself, and no man could write one that would bring my roses to my mind like a single use of the rose in allusion or simile. 'Go, lovely rose'—repeat that, and all the roses you ever loved come up to you again."

Through all my pleasure in her voice I was conscious of a little shock of astonishment at her words. I had already known the purity with which the educated daughters of the upper-class Burgher families spoke English, though it is true they made it a little bookish, because their chief practice of it was in reading the best authors, whereby they mis-pronounced or mis-accented some words, from never having heard them spoken. But I had not met one who talked things like this in English; one who so clearly thought for herself, and thought so clearly in judging what she read. I must confess, however, that I had never held intimate conversation with girls of her class, and therefore I may have been slighting them, by raising her out of

her class in saying to myself as I did, "This girl is evidently **not** one for a fool or a libertine to approach, or indeed any but a sincere and honest man."

Fortunately, it is my wont to carry with me copies of one or two of our best anthologies, and out of my memory I could quote many references to the rose, and from that go on to other flowers that give their sweetness to some of the sweetest lines in our literature.

And all the way as I quoted she enjoyed the lines, and out of her enjoyment could fetch up lines of her own remembering, beautiful lines beautifully understood, so that I at least did not mark that the Captain did not overtake us. And, by way of these remembered fragrances of the gardens that poets have loved, she came to say, "Ah, I have read so much of the rectory gardens in England—had you a garden, too?"

"Nay," I answered soberly, "I had never the fortune to catch the eye of any patron, or in any other way to be presented to any living. I was only a curate. But my aunt had a garden, and she was very fond of it, and would trench, and plant, and cut in it herself, and would never let a man dig in it for her. She says men are such clumsy things."

"Oh! oh!" and with that my companion went into a peal of golden laughter; clear laughter and yet laughter so close to tears that I could hear them through it. By that laughter, too, I could hear how deep her sadness lay, and yet she spoke up charmingly. "Oh, I like your aunt! She is another woman who knows what men really are."

"Ah, does she?" I answered, very pleased. "She is really a most remarkable woman, and she will not have any professional gardener to look after her garden, either. She says they make their gardens so nasty and smelly with patent fertilizers, instead of sweet with flowers—and besides they root out all the sweet old flowers that she used to have as a girl, to make room for the new monstrosities they are always inventing. She says that when I get a living she won't come to it unless she can take her garden with us."

"I hope she will be able to take it. I am sure; oh, I am

certain ; that she will never be happy without her garden." The words burst from my companion's sad lips with such a stress of grief in the ring of their tones that I looked at her quickly. And, behold ! her face was set towards the country where her own garden must be lying, trampled and spoiled and desolate. Her home lay far away, in another quarter of the State, but her heart remembered where its burnt walls stood, and her eyes turned towards it now as the needle turns to the pole.

And while she looked across the feldt in that sad ecstasy of aching regret, our horses, soberly continuing their way, came to the gap in the strong fence of barb wire which had been drawn round the defences of the town ; the gap by which the road entered.

The barb wire fence, and the sentry at the gap, caught her eye just as we were passing within, and straightway her face came down from the far sorrow of her ruined home to the near horror of her captive condition. Her left hand reined her horse in convulsively, her right hand clutching the base of her throat as if she were choking. "Oh ! Oh !" she gasped, low and quiet, the worse for the very quietness, as if death itself had come and gone with that realization that she had passed out of the free wide spaces of the feldt, into the barbed bounds of this prisoned town.

It was not for more than a long breath that she held her horse in thus ; held her face strained to the feldt and her heart to the iron of her grief, but I could see the muscles of her neck and lips working, could see the clutch of her fingers on rein and throat, could read in all her figure all the agony of the moment to her. Then slowly she turned her eyes to the dusty street of the prisoning town ; slowly she put her horse to a walk again, and slowly as a flower drooping on its stalk she let her face droop. And then—then the tears came out from beneath her eyelids, not with a hot gush of gusty grief, but quietly and helplessly, as if hope and light were so utterly dead that even despair had not a throb in it to quicken it.

I have heard men say that women's tears are naught. Some women's tears may well be naught, since they themselves are

naught but mere flightiness, but with this girl it was as grievous to see her grief as to see the tears of a strong man. She was not one to weep easily, that I could well see. But there was naught for me to say in comfort of her agony. I was a priest of the people which was destroying her country and people ; priest of them who slew her kin and took herself a captive.. Nay, I was the very friend of the fierce fighter who had captured her. What then should I say to her of God, when, to her, God seemed to have failed her people at the sorest need a people can ever come to: seemed to have failed the right, seemed deaf to all prayers, all justice, even to very mercy.

“ By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept ”—What man’s heart has not thrilled to the sadness of the words? But the bitterest tears the captives shed must have been those when first their land and they passed into captivity, for then it must have seemed to them that God Himself had betrayed them. Who shall measure the agony of that moment?—Surely none that ever felt it will attempt it.

And since I had no word to say, and since she could not think of anything but tears in her grief, so we rode down the street in silence, and all the folk, that had heard of her coming and had turned out to watch her pass, held themselves silent in wonder as we went by, until we came to the street where we must turn to come to the house of the Widow Le Warn.

The men prisoners who had preceded us into the town were standing in a loose crowd behind the bayonets by the old Landdrost’s office, which served as office to the Commandant of the place. That office was but a hundred yards or so further on along the main street we had been riding down, and by the manner in which the prisoners looked our way, and also by the fact that many of the townsfolk stood waiting along the street between us and them, gazing our way expectantly, I saw that everybody thought my companion was to be brought to the Commandant’s office like the rest, and my heart moved within me for thankfulness that she was spared that added trial.

In that thankfulness I led the way along the cross street, till

I could turn into the street at the other end of which stood the house we were going to. Judge, then, of my pain when, before we were half-way along that street, here came the Commandant, spurring furiously after us, and overtaking us, with a peremptory "Hi! Stop!"

We both drew rein and waited, though both shrank at the menacing tone in which he broke out to me. "Where the devil are you taking that prisoner? Bring her over to my office at once! Follow me!" And with the last command he turned his horse across the road, to cross the square to his office, yonder on the other side of the open, tree-bordered space. All the prisoners and half the town were staring this way, and the garden in which I had pointed out a certain lady to the doctor, two or three hours ago, opened on this square, too. Moreover, the lady was in it now, watching.

We had not reached the middle of the square, however; we two riding behind this Jack-in-office; when up from behind us at the gallop—the gallop itself being a deadly offence against the regulations of this "man, clothed in a little brief authority"—up came the Captain, with a turn of the wrist drawing rein at the Commandant's knee.

"Major," came the Captain's voice, in the roused tone that was a danger signal. "Major, we are to take this lady to Widow Le Warn's, where Colonel Rostron has arranged for her to stay and rest a little, and get some change of things and what not, that a woman needs. Then he is coming in to bring her across to your office himself." I could hear in every word that he was fighting his temper down.

The Major—Major Cerison—did not deign to look at the man who was speaking to him till the last word was out. Then, in supreme contempt, he turned his face to the Captain and spoke. "All prisoners are to be brought to my office. She's the worst of the lot! Fetch her this way at once. She's to be sent straight to the 'cage' at Bloemfontein!"

Even my blood rose in me at the tone and the whole insolent manner of the fool, and my eyes went to Old Fireproof in dread of what he would answer. The bad blood which more or less

existed between the fighting men of the columns and the spick-and-span and nagging holders of safe billets along the line of communications was all in his pose, his face thrust forward ever so little, as he answered, "The worst of the lot? Pardon me; you mean the most important. That is why Colonel Rostron wishes to escort her over to your office himself. As she has been virtually commanding so strong a commando for so long, and doing so well against us, he ranks her as a Commandant and accepts her parole as such."

But nay—hear Mr. Mansel's description of the rest, for he came up at that moment.

"'Parole!' snorts the Cerison ass. 'A woman like that, who broke out of a Refugee Camp and ran away to the commandoes! Don't talk rot to me!'

"'Parole!' returns Old Fireproof, smooth and hard as his own bayonet. 'And don't talk rot about Refugee Camps. This lady was carried to a Concentration Camp, a very different thing, and she simply walked out of it at night, and went to fight for her country. That is why Colonel Rostron and the rest of us are so proud of her. Am I to take her back to him and tell him that you wish to send her to the cage before he comes in?'

"'You are to bring that woman to my office after me,' snorts the ass again. 'And don't talk to me about parole again. Parole! by Jove!'

"'Yes, parole, by Jove!' pants Old Fireproof, putting his horse alongside Cerison's with one lift. 'Parole! by Jove!' he shouts again, right in the other's teeth; and his face—well, it was a face that no man faces unless he's iron, or fire, himself, and this fellow was neither, but only a ballroom, drill-book, text-book ass.

"And as he sat and wilted, and as I watched and waited, afraid to the bone that Old Fireproof would slip the steel through him there and then and teach him his lesson for ever and ever in one stroke, here was the girl, quick to see things, white and quiet and in earnest; desperate earnest, and before Old Fireproof could do more to hang himself she'd reined along-

side him, her hand on his arm. 'Don't!' she pleaded. 'Don't get into trouble for me. I am a prisoner. I expect to suffer for having fought for my country. I don't care what is done to me.'

"'Don't you!' burst out Old Fireproof. 'Well, we do; we that captured you; and we mind so much that we're going to see you through this. Come now to the house that is ready for you, and all the asses that ever prowled in the streets must walk wide and bray softly, if bray they must, as they pass your gate,' and all the time he was speaking he was pressing her horse round, between him and the padre, and away they went at a walk towards the Widow Le Warn's.

"And all that time all the Cerison Johnny could say, as he watched them go, was, 'I gave you an order! That's all!' Then he turned his horse and went at a fast walk back to his show, all the town and all the prisoners looking on, while I just put round and shook up my gee-gee to find the Colonel and fetch him in to stop the mess.

"So you see, doctor" (he was telling all this to the doctor, after he had found the Colonel and come back) "there's going to be war in South Africa yet, if somebody doesn't keep off the grass. The girl's at the widow's, with the serjeant-major smoking on a bench, and a few of the fellows cooking chickens in the back garden. Cerison's making the telegraph wire hum, and the Colonel and the Captain and the Cerison-squirt dine at the General's in a couple of hours' time. So what price war before the Cross turns over to-night?"

And the only thing that Mr. Mansel had missed was supplied by me then. "Doctor," I said, "the lady you saw in the garden, this morning, was in that garden again this afternoon. And that garden was near enough for her to hear the very tone, if not the words, of the Captain in defending this Girl of the Commando."

"Phew!" whistled the doctor. "If that was so, then there's going to be war, real war, in South Africa, before we're all out on trek again from this same little dorp. Devil knows how it will all come out—except that the Captain'll still be standing as

stubborn as a rock, all the trouble foaming round him like waves, and as beaten as waves; even if he's only standing with his back to the wall, the firing-party in front of him, and him to be shot at dawn."

"I hope not! I hope not!" I cried, in spite of myself.

"And if he heard you say that," answered the doctor cheerily, "all he'd say would be 'Why not?' Whether he's shot now, or lives another forty years, is all one, he'd say, for he's come to what he was born for; what we're all born for. He's come through the mists and fogs and mirages of life to be a man in his manhood. And when a man has once found his manhood, then he's all right, and as ready for death at this minute as next year at this time. That's him! That's why he's the horror and despair and master of all the good, easy, comfortable rest of us," ended the doctor.

And Mr. Mansel nodded consideringly at all that from the doctor. I, personally, had not a word to say—it was so right.

CHAPTER XXVI

OF HOW THE CAPTAIN SAT, WATCH IN HAND, WATCHING FIVE
MINUTES PASS, AND WHY

I TOO, was invited to dine with the General that night, finding the note upon the table of my tent when I returned after leaving the house of the Widow Le Warn. The General was the General in command of all the Field Forces in that district of the Free State, and it was his wise custom to have his column commanders to dinner on the evening of the day they came in "off trek." Usually he also asked any officer who had specially distinguished himself during the trek, and, in the case of Colonel Rostron's coming in, the Captain was almost a certain guest, while I owed my invitation on this particular night not so much to my cloth, which indeed the General was never slow to honour, but to that friendship of mine with D Squadron about which he seldom failed to make some pleasant jest, whenever he met me.

I dare be bold and say that no other invitation to dinner was ever so welcome to me, since now I could be near my friend in what I feared was to be the crisis of his life. Look at it which way I would, I could not say, "Lo! this will be what will happen, or, lo! that." It was his stubborn refusal to do anything which seemed a shirking of the last least issue involved, which stood in the way of prophecy. With any other man one might say, "This he will not do," or "That he will avoid, because of the consequences." But with him one could only say that whatever he thought was right, that would he do, and having said that one would still be left uncertain, for one could

not say what it was which he would think was right. His point of view was so often new and always unanswerable.

Just before I was thinking it would soon be time to go, however, there came a visitor to interrupt me, but since that visitor was none other than the same lady who had sat in the door of my tent two evenings ago, I found myself unable to show any impatience, or to do any other than be her most humble servant again.

She came to the point almost in the first breath, no sooner returning my salutation than she said, "I came about what happened in the square this afternoon. I saw you from the garden when this funny little Commandant-man rode up, as big as the frog with importance, and beat his big drum at you. The people of the house I'm in were just as big with a long, complete tale about the affair, who this Boer girl is, and what she's done, and so forth. They were rather gleeful that she is to be sent to this cage, whatever that is, though I never heard of it when I was at Bloemfontein. But I hear that the officer who interfered is likely to get into trouble himself, besides making it worse for the girl, and that would be rather a pity; don't you think?"

"It would—a thousand pities," I answered. "I only wish I knew of some way of helping him—and her."

"Well," she went on, and I noticed that she never sat down on this occasion, nor even stood very still, seeming to be ready to step away at the next instant, "Well, I've been wishing that, too; and I've been thinking. And perhaps I might be able to help matters a bit—influence would do it, you know, and we might manage some influence. If you would bring the Captain to see me, I think we might arrange a way out between us. Don't you think it's a rather good idea?"

"I think it would be just the very thing, if you could manage it," I answered. "But I fear it would need a great deal of influence," I added.

"Oh, that is all right. I'll see to all that," she answered at once. "Perhaps you wouldn't mind mentioning the scheme if you are likely to see your friend to-night. If he likes to call, it

can be settled at once, and the wire can go straight away. Shall you be seeing him?"

"I shall," I answered. "The trouble is that we are both dining with the General, and so, though I shall see him and be able to give him your message, yet I cannot say about his calling, though he may explain things to the General, and get leave to come and settle the matter with you that way."

She hesitated for a moment over my answer, and even when she did speak she checked once or twice over the words. "But—could you—could you see him before he goes to dine?" she asked. "As it is so important to him, and to the girl, there seems no time to be lost."

"I can try, and I will try," I answered heartily. "But I must go at once, if I am to succeed," I added.

"Then go. Do go!" she urged, almost feverishly, and there was that in her face which showed me that it was sheer fierce love for him, and not any mere desire to help the girl, which had brought her here to propose this plan.

She could not know that I knew her story; she thought I believed, as she desired me to believe, in her good faith towards the girl; for women are put to as many shifts as men in trying to recover advantages lost through their own act.

Let me confess, however, that I saw her deception and cared naught. My friend was in jeopardy, according to the regulations, for his conduct to the Commandant. It would matter nothing that the Commandant was wholly exceeding his duty in galloping after the girl, of whose existence as a prisoner he was not yet officially aware. It matters nothing that his whole words and manner were insolent and beyond his office to a degree worthy of a public horse-whipping. Regulations are regulations in the British Army, and to my shaken imagination they would only be interpreted more strongly in war than in peace time. And if it be asked why I did not build some hope on the known partiality of the General for the Captain as a fighter, the answer is that the Commandant was not under the General. He was under another General; the General of the Line of Communications, whereas our General commanded only the Field Forces—

the fighting forces—of that part of the State, and the arrangement worked vilely, breeding endless bad blood.

Therefore, if this woman had the influence which I rightly felt she had, and if that influence would save my friend from the consequences of his fierce chivalry, I was as willing to use her for my purpose, by letting her use me for a messenger, as she was willing to hoodwink me to gain her own ends. She cared nothing for his danger, perhaps, but only to have him love her again. I cared nothing for her love, but only for his danger. It was in that mood that I fell in with her plan.

Yet, as she turned to go, she took one step away and then came two steps back in sudden ungovernable earnestness, and I felt a thrill compelling me to believe in her, as she let her soul come out in her face and words. "You will not fail, will you? It is so important; more important than you perhaps understand. Tell him that I have brought him news from home: something he wishes to hear of: I have brought him something he wanted; something he asked for before he left. Or—no—you must not tell him that: not that: leave that to me when he comes. You are a clergyman: you have to keep secrets: don't say anything to him of this, then. Just get him to come to me, and I will do the rest. But be quick: do be quick: before he goes to this foolish dinner: he was always so stern about punctuality. Go!"

And I made no more ado, but went; as feverish to have him go to see her at once as she was to have him come.

But now, when I was come to the widow's garden gate, and the house in the midst of its great garden before me, I felt a sudden chill waft of doubt come upon me as I looked up the path. For I saw a prim, quiet woman coming this way, a woman dressed neatly in black; a woman with a set, pale face, whereout the grey eyes stared sombrely before her. I held the gate open for her; and with a look alone she thanked me. "That," said my heart to itself, "that is the woman who snatched the stick from her mistress and broke it in the room at Bloemfontein."

Up the path I went, but the Captain was busy for a moment,

said the Widow Le Warn, and, quite because I had been blunted of my feverishness by seeing the woman in black, I forgot to press my haste to see the Captain at all costs, and allowed myself to be ushered into a room the window of which stood open to the garden, as did all windows in this house.

Even while I walked to a seat I heard voices outside talking, and when I took the comfortable seat beside the window I could not choose but hear, and the voice I heard talking first was that of Chartley, the reckless one. "Well, so that's Welsh, is it?" he was saying. "I wonder what they'll call a language next."

"That Pondo lingo you talk sometimes," answered the other voice, that of his chum, Corporal Gomer Roberts, one whose presence in the thickest of any "tight corner" was always taken as a matter of course. "I've even heard people call English a language. And it does sound like language when you first hear it—bad language."

"Next?" answered Chartley, with a chuckle. "But what was she saying, anyhow? By the way she stood in front of Old Fireproof, one would think he was a bigger man in your country than the Devil himself."

"In her part of it he is, apparently," answered Roberts. "And from what she said she used to be his mother's maid till she died, and then she went to this other woman she was talking of, whoever she is—and there's your language for you, that can't difference between all those shes."

"Yes, so long as you don't let any schoolmaster hear you," retorted Chartley. "But who's the other woman, and what's she got to do with Old Fireproof?"

"Some woman that wants to marry him, it seems like. And this woman said that that woman had come all this way to bring him a rose he asked for."

"Then that woman this woman talked about must have been badly off for an excuse to buy a ticket for South Africa," answered the voice of Chartley. ("Here, this chicken's done. You hang on to one leg and pull while I hang on to the other; it'll come.) Why didn't she just say she wanted to come, and come? But

what did he say to that? I heard him laying down the law about something very clear."

"*Andras Vawr !*" exclaimed Roberts. "He got a *hwyl* on him straight; he did that. 'If she has brought that rose I asked for, then she has brought something that is dead,' he said. 'The rose I asked for hung on that wall beside that window in September, 1899, and it is dead enough by this time: dead and done with. Other roses may have grown there since, and other fools may have asked for them. But not I. That rose I asked for has not grown again. She may lay its dead leaves in her bosom and water them with her tears, but they'll bloom no more. Never again; no more; the red will come no more into their shrivelledness; no more; no more. The rose that is dead is dead, and all the words that ever were moaned over it will not stir one waft of fragrance from it. I asked for a living rose, and that rose was denied me; I want none of a rose I never saw.'"

"What's *hwyl*?" asked Chartley, reflectively, between strong bites at juicy chicken bones held in his fingers.

"That's *hwyl*," returned Roberts. "It's when it comes on a man chantingly, like reading a chapter out of Isaiah or Jeremiah, or those other old *sants* in the Old Testament."

"So he asked for a rose, did he, and she wouldn't give it him?" pursued Chartley, still reflectively. "Well, Gomer, old man, all I have to say is that he didn't want that rose—or that woman rather, which is what it amounts to. He's not that sort of a man to take No from any woman if he really wanted her; wanted her till the marrow in his bones crawled for her every time he saw her. If he'd been like that, he wouldn't have said, 'Will you give me that rose?' He'd just have said, 'Give me that rose, sweetheart,' and he'd have looked at her, and smiled at her, and she'd have given him the rose, and the roots of the rose as well if that was all, and her blood besides to make it redder if it wasn't red enough to please his high and august notions. So we needn't black our tunic buttons for anything he lost, so far as that rose goes. If he didn't get that rose, it's because he didn't want it bad enough. But what price this

chicken?—isn't it a ripper? And won't this fat-headed Commandant get on his hind legs and howl the moon down when he finds all his chickens gone? We didn't leave him one—except an old rooster that must have come up country with the voortrekkers. He must have been levying chickens from every farm within reach."

So the talk of the two Irregulars drifted away to things more interesting to them; to horses, to the girls in the town, to the extras they were going to buy from the shops, to whatever drew their minds for a thought.

My own mind drifted back to the piteous eagerness of my visitor of twenty minutes ago; to her earnestness when she had urged me to come quickly and send him to her before we went to the General's, and straightway like a haunting outburst from Isaiah came the echo of the Captain's answer—"No more: no more: never again." Small wonder that my mind sank as I waited.

Even the Captain's hearty voice, as he entered a minute or two later, hardly cheered me. "Why didn't you come through to the stable?" he demanded. "I was just changing into decent kit, and they didn't tell me you were here. Well, and we've got ten minutes to wait yet before we're nearly due. Shall we walk round and look at the garden?"

"No, we have only just time for me to take you to a house I want you to come to with me. Come now, and we'll just have time," I said; though that was nothing less than inspiration moving me to pure boldness.

"Right; let us go at once," he answered, leading the way out with free strides. It was not in his nature to suspect me of subterfuge.

Outside I in my turn took the lead, closing up my fears and imaginings and locking them fast, resolute to think on nothing but victory if once I should get him into the presence of the woman who had come so far to yield all up to him. And as if a charm were on him, he walked beside me, frank as a boy, passing in with ready step through the gate as I held it open to him, and asking no question even when I knocked at the open door

of the house. And when I say that the house had been the house of the Boer pastor of the town, those who know South Africa will know what a roomy, comfortable house it was, and in how big and fine a garden it was set.

A Kaffir girl came to the door, but I asked her nothing. Instead of my usual punctiliousness I at once led the way over the threshold into the passage, and then through the first door I saw, one to the left, trusting to Providence that it should be the right one.

It was the right one, in all save that she whose knick-knacks on every table, and whose music open on the rack of the open piano, claimed it for her own, was for the moment absent. My heart sank from its height at that, but, still resolved, I turned to the Kaffir girl with an order. "Go to the lady at once, and tell her that the chaplain is here, and a friend with him. Make haste."

Only then did I turn to meet the Captain's eye, but the Captain's eye had no look to spare for me. The Captain's eye was bent like an eagle's at the table in the centre of the room, on which were ranged half a dozen large photographs in rich frames, and while I looked his feet began to follow his eyes straight to the table.

I made no more ado but followed too, and when the Captain picked up the first photo, I understood clearly what it was, as he said, in iron quiet, "My own old hound, Old Cavall, sitting in my own old corner in her boudoir!"

The hound was a noble-looking bloodhound, and his eyes from the photo were looking straight into the eyes of his master here, the Captain.

Then the Captain, still holding that photo in his left hand, took up another in his right, and, looking at that, went on, "And here's Old Moroedd, my old horse, standing on her lawn too. Aye!"

Holding those two, one in each hand, his eyes sought the other photos on the table. But to them he said nothing, neither to the one where she was cutting the rose, nor the one of Llys Rono, his own home. Only he nodded, just once, to one

which depicted a weird dark tarn beneath a black cliff, so high and straight that its top went out of the picture altogether, and then in another minute he said, "See that cliff above that llyn? It goes up a thousand feet sheer. My people used to throw their enemies from its top into the water below. We have a name for it—and a hundred tales of it."

Then, as if at that he came out of dreams, he turned to me. "Well," he said, "I know now who it is you brought me here to meet, for I heard already that she was in the town. And"—here he took out his watch—"there is just seven minutes before we must be at Headquarters to dinner. It takes two minutes to go there, and that leaves five here. Right then; you shall sit down now, and I will stay here to the last second of the five minutes. Then we go."

"But may I not go and tell the lady?" I asked.

"Nay," he returned grimly: "if she comes she comes and I am here. But things shall take their chance. Sit then, and I will sit, and we will see what comes of it. I'll give in so far as that."

"Is that wise?" I urged. "She seems a woman in ten thousand. And she is a good womau. She is here for the Help to the Hospitals Society, of which she is President. She is quite here on duty."

"And that duty she discharges by deputy, I'll warrant," said the Captain unsparingly. "Come, I don't know; I have not asked, and I have not heard, but I'll guarantee there is some little-thought-of-and-less-heard-of woman along with her, who does all the drudgery of the Society, whatever it may be, while this friend of yours lends an air of distinction and importance to the affair, which, doubtless, is of great help to the sick and wounded. Confess; is there not some such satellite attendant upon your star?"

I had to hesitate. "Well, there is the secretary, a very estimable woman. But, I assure you——"

The grim little smile on his face stopped me. One might as well have talked to a flint. I could only wait with a straining ear for the coming of the woman whose partisan I had become.

The strain grew more than I could bear in stillness. To sit still while the seconds passed was pain to the flesh as well as the mind. "There are still two minutes," he said, and he spoke quietly, though I knew the strain was on him too, in spite of his iron restraint.

"Sir," I cried, half rising: "let me go and look for her."

"Sit down," he answered. "God shall judge between us."

And I sat, and the seconds-finger ran round on his watch-face once, and I thought I heard the rustle of the woman's dress approaching. He heard the sound also, but no sign came into his impassive face, neither hope nor dread, nor joy nor disappointment: nothing. His eyes still followed the clicking watch-finger, the sound of a woman's dress went away; the seconds-finger went jerking round, to the forty; to the fifty; to the sixty. The five minutes were up. He put his watch back into his pocket: he rose. "Come, Mr. Allen, let us go to dinner," he said.

"May I not try once?" I begged.

"I'm going to dine with the General," he answered. "It is an order." And with a grim nod to me, he turned and went.

I could not go. I could not follow him at once. I felt that I should not be able to sit down at the General's table, and eat and drink and talk, with this piteous failure unexplained. While he went out of the front door I turned to the kitchen and found the Kaffir girl again. "Did you tell the lady?" I asked her.

"I tell the sec'etry, and she say she will tell the other lady too," answered the girl.

Suspicion of what had happened flashed through me, but just then I heard someone go into the room we two had just left, and I hastened there again. As I reached the door I met the secretary—"the little-thought-of-and-less-heard-of satellite"—coming out again; "Oh, Mr. Allen," she said (for I had met her that morning), "the servant told me that you were here with a friend, but I was just dressing, so I came to see who it really was before telling S——. Is there anyone here with you really?"

"There was," I answered, and then for a moment I could not say another word, being too shocked at the utter banality of this thing that had so fatuously wrecked me of victory, just when all seemed won.

Nor, when I had kept silent for a minute, considering the naturalness of the thing, could I find any other words than—"Yes, there was; but he is gone. It was the Captain she so much wished to see, and had sent me to fetch. We sent the Kaffir servant to tell her, and we waited till the last second, and then he had to go. And I shall be late. Good-evening." And so I left the "little-thought-of-and-less-heard-of satellite" standing in the doorway, while I hastened away to the General's quarters.

I was late for dinner by just the four minutes I had stayed behind.

CHAPTER XXVII

OF THE STRANGE MANNER IN WHICH THE CAPTAIN SAVED THE PRISONER FROM THE "CAGE"—BY A WEDDING—AND OF THE STRANGE FASHION OF WEDDING IT WAS.

HERE it should be said that the General's quarters had been an hotel before the war ruined everything. The dining-room, therefore, was a huge oblong room, and the one table, which would just seat the twelve of us, was a mere islet of table in a sea of room. The General, moreover, did not sit at the end of the table, but at the middle of the farther side, whereby he could both carry on a conversation with any man at the board and also face whoever should enter the room.

To-night he had kept a chair for me on his left, being always most punctilious of the honour due to my cloth, and it seemed that the Captain had made my excuses for me, saying that I had been detained to speak with the President of the H.H.S. I need not here set down all the merry quips with which the General kept us all smiling at my expense for the next five minutes, save that the burden of his sallies was that they had not expected it of me, that I, even I, could not resist a frock straight from Paris, if it were on a lady straight from Mayfair.

As to the dinner it was plain fare enough, as might be expected in war, but the talk was keen sense and wit for the more part as we went on, so that, though I could not shake off the sense of tragedy which had haunted me from the other house, yet I began to hope good things as far as the Captain's matter with the Commandant was concerned. For I should say that, while

Colonel Rostron was on the General's right, as was right, the Commandant was at the left end of the table only, whereas the Captain was placed opposite the General, as in the third most honourable place, for Generals love such Captains as he. Yet all the time I noticed that the Commandant had little to say, in the way of wit, that was not edged with a sense of his own importance.

We were coming to the end of the meal, however, before he broke out upon the thing which was simmering under all else with him. It was the General who opened up the particular passage of the badinage which served to explode the Commandant's wrath. "By the way, Rostron, what is our gallant going to do with his prisoner, now that he's captured her?"

"Well," returned the Colonel, affecting grave thoughtfulness, "I can only see that he'll have to marry her. He had his chance of escape a day or two before that, but he merely shot her horse instead of her. So now——"

"Does she know it was he who did that?" demanded the General.

Rostron laughed softly. "She does. He told her himself. You should have seen her. Oh!"

"Oh!" the General laughed, too. "What did she say to you then?" he demanded of the Captain.

The Captain was smiling a little grimly. "Words!" he answered. "Many words; warm words; great words of soft indignation. She was very indignant that I should shoot her horse."

"And what said you to that?" demanded the General again.

"I told her that that was quite an accident: quite my bad shooting, so that I hit the wrong mark. I told her I did not intend to hit the horse at all—it was she herself I was trying to hit."

"Ah! and what did she answer?" The General spoke all our eagerness for us.

"Not a word: nothing but a quick gasp and a long round-eyed stare of horrified amazement."

"And then?" prompted the General.

"Then I spoke to her quietly and seriously, explaining to her what real war really is: the damnable horrible thing it is; instead of this glorified sporting-picnic that the papers keep on calling 'The South African War,' where the heading should really be 'The great South African Land Trouble and Eviction Campaign.'"

The General nodded vigorously. "And after that?" he prompted again.

"She is still staring over it in her mind. She is still in amazement; still thinking in wonder," spoke the Captain quietly.

It was here, just when the Captain, by his way of words, had brought all the rest of us into such true tune and sympathy with the prisoner,—just here it was that the Commandant broke in with the thing which set all our chords to jarring. He leaned across the table from the end where he was sitting. "Well, she'll have plenty of time, and a good place, for continuing to think it over. She'll be sent to Bloemfontein to-morrow, to go into the wire cage they've made for dangerous women like her."

The mention of that "cage," about which we knew so little, and yet had heard so much that we had wholly mis-drawn it in our imaginations, rasped more than one of us to the bone, but every man seemed to be watching the darkening face of the Captain as he turned it to the Commandant. "The cage," he said, his voice seeming to choke him a little, so that he spoke slowly. "Why should such a girl be sent to such a place? She, of all the women in the world, when you've only to put her on her honour that she will meddle no more with the war, and then she can be allowed to go down to Cape Town, or somewhere like that, to recover her health, for she's simply worn out with the life she's been leading."

"Yes," retorted the Commandant eagerly; "we've all heard all about the life she's been leading"—and his voice had that inflection of significance which assails a woman's good name. "We've heard—and then you talk of putting her upon her honour;

much she knows of honour! Ask the women of this place."

The Captain's eyes were glittering: the Captain's face was paling: the Captain's voice was grim and slow as he spoke back. "Is that what you did? Is that what you did when you had gathered all your garrison to go out and capture her at Frolich's Farm, because she was there with only a patrol, and she drove you back here like deer—did you go to the women then to ask them who this girl was, and did they tell you that?"

The thrust went home under the breast-bone of the Commandant, slacking his mouth and shaking the look in his eyes to flickering. And all to hide it he brought out a blustering mouthful. "It was not. You needn't ask the English women of the place: ask the Boer women, her own people, what her character is."

I, for one, felt a thrill of fear as I saw the look that came into the Captain's face and heard the first tone of his voice. He half rose from his seat, leaning over the board, his hands upon it supporting him, his lean fingers arched over the handle of the knife beside his plate. "Ask her character!" he thundered. "Am I a squealing baby, with the milk running down my chin, that I should ask any parcel of quacking women for another woman's character, if that woman be so much truer and nobler than themselves that she's beyond their understanding? And you, you sewer-noser! you Aunt Nancy!—if you, or any man like you, in all this round world of God, say that this woman is any other than pure and womanly, then I say you lie! I say it to you again—you lie! Hear it again—you lie!"

There sat no man at that board who had not been in battle often, but there sat no man there either who could do other than hold his breath at the fury of this man's tone, as he flung out the words, like the concussion of artillery for insistent commandingness. The wretched fool who had provoked it answered no word, for a swift glance round the board showed him that he had not a single backer even the General leaving him to the

consequences of his attack upon a woman's character—or, it may be, watching the whole thing like a play.

Then Colonel Rostron stirred to save his Captain from himself, rising and leaning over as if he would put a hand on the shoulder of this figure of fury. But the Captain drew back, standing upright. "No, sir; I am right: you know I am right. She is our prisoner—who shall stand for her good name if we do not? She is a woman, and only men can defend her: shall we leave her to the tongues of these damnable offal-pickers and garbage-gorgers!"

Before the Colonel could reply a fresh gust of passion shook the face of the Captain, and torrent words came again. "Colonel! you know me. I'll stand for this woman. If her word of honour is not reckoned enough, mine is. That at least has never been doubted about me, wherever else I fail. I'll give my word for this girl, that she'll keep faith with us if we don't send her to the cage—and if she does break faith, then you can 'break' me and welcome. Is that enough?"

"For us it is," spoke the Colonel quickly. "For us, who took her, her own word is quite enough. But it's not we here; it's the people at Headquarters. They don't know her. They've only heard what these miserable wretches in the town keep inventing about her. It is they who send for her the moment they know we've captured her."

For one breath the Captain stood at pause, like a tiger eyeing a spectator through the bars, and while he paused the General spoke. "That is the way of it Captain. The girl is a Burgher girl: she is known to have been the inspiration of this commando while it's been so active and effective. She has been captured, and Headquarters have a rule for dealing with such capture. Cerison here is ass enough, but he is only obeying orders. She is a Burgher girl, taken in the field—that's their point."

The Captain had been holding a great breath while he listened. "Their point! Yes! But how much of their point is due to the backbiting of this miserable midden of a town?"

Sir, let me bring the girl here herself, that you may see and speak with her."

"It's not needed," returned the General. "You know her, and you've told us. That's enough."

"Thank you, sir, for its being enough for you. But these others at Headquarters—they'll say I'm only one man and that I'm mistaken, or I'm a fool who doesn't know. If you see her, they'll have to listen to you. Let the chaplain come with me now, and we'll ask her to come and speak with you. Then you'll know, just as I know, and that'll be enough.

The General looked at the Colonel, as if asking if this were the Captain as his comrades knew him. The Colonel nodded. "Let him do it, sir. He'll be satisfied then."

"Very well, then," said the General, nodding permission.

The Captain turned. "Come, Mr. Allen," he said to me, and I rose and followed him.

All the way down the street the Captain was raging. "Think what the men would feel; the men who took the koppie, when we captured her, if they thought she were to be sent to this cage the women talk to them so much about! How could one ask them ever to fight again if this is what happens?" And so he went on, venting the fury of his chivalrous fierceness through the dusk, and not stopping it till we came almost to the gate. Nay, the anger was still in his stride when we came to the door of the house and he opened it, walked straight in, and turned into the room where sat the girl with the Widow Le Warn.

Quietly she rose at our entrance, her eyes upon his eyes, waiting as if to receive some shock. She was dressed in white, the usual wear for girls in South Africa, and for all ornament she had one great pink rose on her breast. But the look in her face drew my eyes from all that, for it made me think again of Mr. Mansel's description of her as the statue of the First Mother of the World, facing her destiny—it sounded so right and true as I looked at her there. "Surely," I said to myself, "surely if artist ever pictured our First Mother, he must picture her with that look on her face. Surely if sculptor ever chiselled the form that drew our First Father to beget us, he must chisel this

girl in marble as she stands now in the flesh !” And as often as I remember her, I remember her as she stood there, awaiting what blow might come.

And like as she stood and faced the Captain, her eyes upon his eyes, so he stood at pause, facing her, his eyes upon her eyes, his whole pose like one through whose mind some new world of thought is sweeping. The impassiveness of his face was at the opposite pole to the arrested alertness of his pose, and while I took in that aspect of him, he had made up his mind. Instead of the greeting I expected to hear him come out with, the direct request that she would come with us, he changed our whole errand. “Madame,” he said, “I come from the General. But I must just speak to the chaplain here for a moment first. Excuse me for a moment, then. Come, Mr. Allen,” and he turned to me and led me out into the night again.

Yet as I turned I could not help being cut to the heart by the look of mute dread which whitened her face as she watched us turn. I trusted God for her: I could not believe that God would fail her now in this utter extremity, but yet I feared, my heart sinking till all my thoughts were prayers to Our Father to spare her any further suffering.

Till we were out in the middle of the street my friend kept his grim silence, but there, turning upon me, he made up for that by the fierce burst of words which overwhelmed me. “Mr. Allen, I captured this girl; and then she was bracing herself to face the horrible things we should do to her—so many vile stories have been set going in the commandoes about what we do to such prisoners. And you can imagine how I turned to and told her the truth, and tried to quiet her fears, and how I swore that of course our one rule would be to see how honourably we could treat her. And she wouldn’t let me swear it. ‘No,’ she said, ‘if you tell me that I am safe, that is enough; I believe you.’ And she did believe, and she grew quite contented about that. And now, between these miserable women in this town, and that spick-and-span cur of a Commandant, she is to go down to the cage! What manner of liar, and worse, will she hold me now !”

My protest burst out of itself. "She cannot! She cannot No one can!"

"She can: she will: she must," he insisted, adamantly. "But I will not have that. There is no length I will not go sooner than that. Death!—death is the trumperiest thing in the world. It's life that counts, and life is only honour if it's life at all. I'll not stand dishonoured in this girl's eyes. She shall never know that the honour of our people failed her. Sooner than that——"

"You cannot!" I burst in. "You cannot harm her. There must be some other way."

"One; yes, there is one thing that may prove to be a way," he answered, in his relentless voice. "I'll make her marry me now. We'll go in, and you shall marry us at once. They won't put the wife of an officer with my record in that cage. You needn't fear that I'll take any advantage of her. She can stay here to-night, and we'll get a permit in the morning and send her straight to Cape Town by the first train. I'm quite likely to be killed before the war's over, and if I don't, she can easily keep clear of me if she thinks I'm not the man to be her husband. Come now."

Then it was that I remembered the other woman, and the cause of our waiting for nothing in the house of that woman. "But," I urged, "there is the lady we called upon before dinner. She did not come to us because she did not know we were there. The Kaffir girl only told the secretary, and the secretary stayed to beautify herself before carrying the message on. She wished to have her share of us, I suppose. But the other woman has come seven thousand miles for your sake, and yet, without seeing her, you wish to marry this girl who is your prisoner. Think of the other woman!"

"That woman!" he broke out with iron contempt. "That woman threw me over as if I were a dog, for the most contemptible reason that could move any woman to such an action. From that day I've been done with her: she's no more to me than if she did not exist. Think of her no more. But this girl won't marry me to save herself from the cage, or any other fate

of ours for her: She won't marry me unless she thinks I want herself; she's far too proud for anything less than that. Well, and I'll win her fairly and honestly. Come in, and you shall see that I do it fairly."

My feeble answer to this outburst amazes me now when I remember it. "But," I urged, "she will know that it is not your fault if they do send her to the cage. No one can blame you."

"No one blame me!" he burst out. "Do you think that of me? Do you think that I care one spent breath whether the whole round world blames or praises me for any one thing I ever do? I do not care! I never did care! But I'd take my soul to the stake a thousand times sooner than break a trust. I've made her trust me to see her through, and I'd sooner kill her a thousand times than let her feel once I'd failed her. Come: there is just this one chance. Come on!"

And I, not shocked, not awed, not spent with argument, but sheerly browbeaten out of all will to resist, turned and followed him without a word, for this seemed in truth the one chance to save her, to save him, to save our very name, from a tragedy too piteous for words. Yea, in the face of his adamant will even the importance of the other woman seemed to dwindle to me, till she was no more than a something outside real life—real life seemed to include only this problem of saving the Captain by saving the girl. I even prayed that she might accept him in the strange wooing I was to witness.

We found her standing alone this time, with the great Dutch Bible open upon the table under her hand as she faced us, as if she had been snatching a little help and hope from its sacred words and promises, to strengthen her and hold her up against our returning.

Their eyes met, but he said not a word to warn her as he dropped his cap, walked across to her, put his left hand upon her arm, and looked straight into her troubled eyes. Then, however, his voice came, and I do not know whether it was more a voice of fearless mental strength, or of quiet content. "Madame," he said, "this my friend here—your friend—is a

minister of Christ, and so I have brought him with me to be my witness and your help. Now, tell me; do you remember that night when you first saw me, you carrying a lamp and I carrying the steel?"

She had been watching his face through it all with those same troubled eyes, and now she answered his question as simply as words can fall. "Can I ever forget?"

He seemed to thank her with a slow inclination of the head before he went on, gentleness gaining on all else in his tones—"And do you remember that I begged you to give me the rose from your breast—and you gave it to me?"

For a moment her lips winced and her eyes flickered, her throat moving as if she swallowed something. Then she said, a little huskily, "Could a woman ever forget that?" (Here it should be said that Africanders have no shame of love. They are too frank and simple for any such poor mockery of real modesty.)

"And do you remember," he went on, gentler still, but with a stronger appealing in his tone, "do you remember that at dawn the other morning, when we met again on the koppie, you knew me at once—and you blushed?"

This time she did not speak, but in some subtle way her face signified assent, while her eyes seemed to widen, looking into his and wondering and dreading.

"Then," he continued, a little ring of mastery coming into the strong gentleness of his voice: "then that is plain proof that you had been thinking of me always, from the night you gave me the rose to the dawning when you blushed at meeting me. You did think of me always—did you not?"

This time she answered him quickly, desperately. "I did think: what else was it made me go out and join the commandoes? Truly I did think, for when I found that the man I had let go free was the man who was so desperate a fighter against us—oh! I could have killed myself to wipe out my disgrace. That was why I came so far, to the commandoes that were fighting you, instead of to the one my own relations were with. I had learnt at last where you were, and how you had befooled

poor foolish me to let you go, when a single cry of mine would have filled the darkness with men running over each other to kill or capture you. God knows I did think : it was to ease the pain of thinking that I went out to help the commandoes."

He was now disturbed by her outburst. He still kept on in the same strong tones of gentle insistence. "But you were wrong. You could not truly blame yourself. There was your father, there were your grandfather and brothers—it would have been death for one or more of them. You could not seal their death-warrant."

"Why not?" she demanded, a swift, despairing vehemence lifting in her voice, but in that alone. "That is the sting. Why should I have thought of them before my country? They might have died, but it would have been your death-warrant too, and that would have been worth it. There are hundreds of thousands of your troops in the feldt: they cover the land like locusts; but it is the few like you who cause them to prevail against us. Them we could conquer, but for those like you. And then you could ask me for that rose, so that I would let you go! Oh, it was shameful!"

His hand went up commanding her lips to cease, and his voice came with an under thrill in it. "Stop! you know that is not true! You know that you are saying what your heart knows is not true. Your heart knows that my heart asked for the rose from your breast."

She looked at him with fascinated eyes, and her voice would not come. His voice went on: "And your heart knows that it was not because of the danger to your father and your people that you let me go. Your heart knows that it was for the pity of what I had confessed, when I pleaded for the rose, that you gave me good-night so gently and let me go."

He paused; she found her voice. "Is not that worse?" she asked softly.

"It is not worse. It is no question of worse"—his eyes were beginning to burn now. "It was only that God made you a woman, and all so splendid a woman that you could not be false to your womanhood. It was no thing of Boer or Briton, or of

war then, as I stood pleading and you stood yielding. What had we two to do with wars then? What have we two, you the woman and I the man, to do with wars now? Nothing!"

Her breast was heaving with a slow swell and fall, her face paling more still as she still looked into his eyes. Just his nostril showed the fire burning in him, widening a little before he spoke again. "And—your heart gave me the rose from your breast that night: you cannot deny that!" There was a ring of insisting challenge growing in his tone.

Her eyes fell: her face dropped. She must have read at last what was coming. Desperately she put a hurried question. "And what did she—the woman—say when you told her that someone else had given you a rose?"

His mind would not be shaken or turned aside. "That woman I have never seen again. We have no more to do with her, you and I. You and I have only ourselves to face, since the night when you gave me that rose."

Still she was silent. Her face fell lower, but he put out his hand and lifted her eyes to his again. "You cannot deny what I said. Your heart gave me the rose; your heart gave it to my heart. You dare not deny that."

"No," she said; just the one word, and oh! so quietly. But as she spoke it the lids closed over her eyes, and great shining tears began to force their way out and fall. It was so piteous to see; so very piteous that I felt a rush of relief as he laid his lips to hers softly and kissed her, both his arms holding her close to him. "Sweet heart!" he said, and then he kissed her again and still again, murmuring words of some language which I do not know, but which assuredly meant "Sweet heart! Sweet heart! Dear heart!"—if ever the tone of a word fitted its meaning.

She did not open her eyes: the tears still came: the lips and the throat still twitched, but she made no sound of sobbing. He continued his purpose. "Sweet heart, your hand gave me the rose from off your breast; but your heart gave me the rose that was in your breast—yourself. I have kissed you. No other man ever kissed you like that. You have confessed that you love me, and I—I have never felt that womanhood was so

holy as I feel it now, with you in my arms. You must be my wife now : you must ! you must !” And between the words as he insisted he was kissing her as only a true lover does.

Even now she did not speak, neither did she move in his arms. Her face remained as he held it ; the slow bright tears swelling from under the lids in such piteous wise that I feverishly prayed God for her. But he seemed quite sure : he had no doubt. He turned to me. “ Please call Mrs. Le Warn, and the serjeant-major, and the men, for witnesses, and we will begin.”

“ I have no Prayer-Book,” said I hurriedly, inwardly wondering at such a fatuous last attempt to prevent him.

“ I have,” he answered ; “ the one I use for reading the service over the men that are killed. Here it is,” and from the pocket of his tunic he handed me a Prayer-Book, the backs of which were missing, while the last leaf was black with blood-stain. It was book enough, however.

I seemed to find the widow, and the serjeant-major, and the men, all waiting in the next room, and they needed only a sign to bring them after me into the room where the Captain was still holding the girl in his arms. “ Serjeant-major,” he said, in a clear glad voice, “ this lady is going to become my wife, now. I want you and Mrs. Le Warn and the men to witness the marriage.”

“ Very good, sir,” answered the grey serjeant-major, drawing himself up and saluting for this occasion, while the widow gave an equal assent by taking out her gold-rimmed spectacles. She stood in some awe of the Captain. The men shifted their feet and cleared their throats as if they got ready to defy someone.

So I went through the service, and at the proper place the Captain said to his bride—“ This is where you say, ‘ I will.’ Please say ‘ I will.’ ”

“ I will,” she said, opening her wet eyes for just one flash.

When the ring was wanted he called to Mrs. Le Warn : “ Lend me that ring off your finger,” he said, but one of the men spoke up. “ Captain, I’ve one I can give you. I think one

will fit," and out from his pocket he drew several, some with stones and some without.

"Loot—from some shop," said the Captain, with a brief smile, but he chose one that fitted, and thanked the man, and put it on the bride's finger, and so the last obstacle was overcome. And when the ceremony was ended he dismissed the witnesses with a bright, "Thank you, Mrs. Le Warn! Thank you, gentlemen!" and so bowed them out.

"And now," he went on to his bride, "you will just bathe your eyes and come with me, and we will tell the General."

She answered only—"I could not help crying. I could not stop the tears."

"Why, dear heart," he said, "how should you keep from crying, after all you have gone through these few days past? The tears had been storing in your heart; they had to come out, once you were safe that I loved you."

"But I am not fit to be your wife,—I know I am not," she urged.

"Nay, you have it wrong," he protested. "It is I who am not fit to be your husband. I know what I am—I know!"

So they ended the ceremony of marriage as man and woman should, humble towards each other.

I, looking at them, was busy wondering whether the marriage was quite legal or not, and thinking of the other woman. I remember I was not astonished at what the Captain had done.

CHAPTER XXVIII

OF WHAT HAPPENED WHEN WE RETURNED TO THE GENERAL'S
HOUSE, AND OF THE ONE REAL REASON WHY A MAN MARRIES
ANY WOMAN

WHILE the new-made bride went to bathe her eyes—and also, it might be, as I thought, to touch up her hair and her dress, which, though they lacked nothing in the eyes of any man beholding, yet had been no way prepared for a bridal—black fear came upon me.

This thing just done was not the usual thing. Here was a British officer, marked red for promotion, a gentleman of ancient lineage and—this the thing most weighty with me, I fear—literally sought by such a woman as this other woman, yet he had married a Burgher girl at a breath, and that in the teeth of an openly flung scandal. Indeed it was not the usual way of things; and it argued him as being in a mood so unflinching that he would hesitate at nothing; literally nothing.

It was true that scandal could not look in her face and live: it was true that in her look and figure she was fit to have mated with any chosen man: it was true that she belonged to the upper class of her own nation; and it was true that she was thoroughly well educated.

Also, it was true that the Captain was a relentless crusher of convention whenever it lay in the way of what he believed right, and yet, in spite of all that, so strong is convention in the blood of most of us that when I considered her, a daughter of the enemy, taken in the field fighting against us, and then remembered the other woman, his neighbour at home, one of

his own class—owner too of the greater part of the lands of his fathers, so that she would have brought them back to the old blood again—I thought that good could never come of the thing he had just done. And the other woman and he had been lovers once ; affianced lovers.

I looked at his face, to see if any thoughts of all these things had room there. But I saw no sign of any counting of the cost. He came of no flickering breed. The light that had quickened the whole aspect of his face on that battle morning, when he roared upon the men to shoot this girl—that light was on his countenance now, when he had just married the same girl he himself had shot at then. But here the bride came in.

Straightway as I looked at her all the arguments of convention withered into naked foolishness. Through the sweet purity and the soft directness of her former look there was growing a light of reverent wonder, as if she were facing some white dawn, where the glory of the lilies of Heaven was rising upon her eyes and quickening like a slow fire in her soul.

All in a breath my mind shifted : I no longer troubled for him ; all my fear was for her, the innocent victim of circumstances, her fate none of her own contriving, brought by her own sweetness into the jeopardy of five minutes ago, for had she been less sweet then he had been less fierce either to protect her or to stand well with her. And now by her woman's love she was betrayed into the lion's den of what her adamantine husband might do in the next fifteen minutes, pushing his quarrel with the Commandant.

She had come two stately steps into the room, her eyes wondering on him, when the widow came after her with something, softly calling her back for a moment. And then, for a sign of happiness, this bride of a bridegroom who, ten minutes ago, was one of the enemy looked round at the widow to see what she wanted, and next turned her face to her husband again, mutely waiting his permission to go. It was with a face all sheer pride and mastery that his look assented.

As she stepped out I could bear it no longer : the fear of

what he would do when he came face to face with the Commandant again was too black before me. "Captain," I said, "now that she is your wife you are not free to do as you will. Surely you will relent now and accept the will of God if she is sent to the cage?"

"It will not be the will of God, but of man!" he answered in his most relentless tone. "And shall I let my wife go where I would not let my prisoner go? If I was too proud to fail of a trust to my prisoner, am I not prouder still for my wife? You've heard and you've read of the pride of hell, but I tell you there is no pride there: hell was harried to the bare walls, and even the ashes raked, to get all the pride that went to the making of me. She is my wife: we have done what we could to save her: the rest is on their heads, whatever happens. And the Cross shall not swing over before that Commandant takes back, with just as wide a mouth as he spoke it, the thing he said of my wife."

Before I could speak farther she came in, and I had no further chance, for she was saying softly to him that her hostess wished to give her a diamond buckle to put in her hair, but that she had begged to be excused. "I thought,"—and she hesitated as if an endearing word were tripping her tongue to come out to him, "I thought that perhaps you would not mind if I would rather wait till you should give me anything I was to have—like that."

"Thank you for that, dearie," he said, and then added softly, "And now we will go."

But all this only made the whole thing I feared seem more horrible still, and out in the dark, as we three went up the street, I was praying, praying, praying for this poor bride, that God would be less iron than man. When we reached the General's quarters, and I opened the door of the dining-room, entering a moment in advance of my companions, that those within might know who was coming, I almost quaked with dread. Some men are terrible in their remorseless fearlessness, or rather defiance, of death or of consequences of any sort. This man following me in was the very pattern of those men,

and as I thought of that I stood fast, half-way down the room, to wait whatever should happen.

The room was one long enough to let a lady move along it at her natural pace, and there may be, here and there in the world, women who walk with as subtle, rhythmical a grace as she, who seemed to glide rather than walk. Also there may be men who carry themselves with as proud a challenge in every line of face and figure as he who walked beside her. But neither can be common, or else the effect here would have been less instantaneous. For, as they advanced, all men there rose instinctively, as men will rise at the coming of a rare gentlewoman, and their eyes were upon her in quick wonder. A smile like a flame burnt in the Captain's face at that.

With a soft touch the Captain stayed the girl's step just behind the chair he had sat in, so that she faced the General. For the slightest of pauses those two looked at each other, the General and this daughter of the enemy, the Captain disdaining the convention of a formal introduction. Then something in the General's face satisfied her, and with the faintest and most gracious bow she accepted his scrutiny.

The General gave her the full bow of surrender in return, and then he shot one keen look at the Captain. "Sir, was I right?" demanded the latter proudly.

"You were wrong in one thing," answered the General quietly; "you were wrong to trouble about what's going to be done with this young lady. When she gets to Bloemfontein, Headquarters there will be just as much her humble servant as you are."

"Thank you for that, sir, but they will not," rang out the Captain instantly. "She is not going. She is my wife. I have just made her marry me." And with the word he took her hand in his left hand, and drew himself up and saluted, for he still had his cap on.

The General stared—rankly and frankly stared,—but before he could get one word out Colonel Rostron threw up his face and laughed, jerking out great gasps of commendation in between. Whereat,—I fear me it was I who started it—the

rest of us, save one, broke into a good round rousing cheer, as loud as eight of us could make it.

Then the Colonel was shaking the Captain's hand. "Well done! Well done!" was all he could get out for awhile, repeating and repeating it again before he turned to the General with—"Sir, didn't I tell you? He can't be beaten. You can't beat him. You head him off on one side, and before you can say 'Got you!' he's round your flank and turned you out of your position from a side you never expected him on."

But before the General could answer the wretched Commandant put in his croak. "Headquarters are not going to listen to that. Headquarters wired that I must send Miss Villiers by the first train, under strong escort."

Loud and high rang the Captain's voice as he answered. "And now you can wire Headquarters that there is no Miss Villiers to send. Now you can tell Headquarters that there's my wife here, and a permit is wanted at once for her to go down to Cape Town by the first train. Set your wire going as soon as you like."

"Cerison!" broke in the General cheerily: "don't be such an endless ass! Leave this matter to me. I'll see things through. And—here! Jackson; we have a few champagne somewhere—have it out at once, and let's have a round to the health of the bride. But you—" he turned to the Captain. "You cheated us out of the best. Why didn't you let us come to the wedding?"

"Because there would have been no wedding, perhaps, if I'd given her time to breathe," returned the Captain at that. "Ask the chaplain; he'll strengthen me there."

"I'd rather ask the wife, for she's the only one who really knows," retorted the General with a quick smile. "But,"—here a sudden thought seemed to strike him—"tell me, my dear," he went on to the bride, in a most fatherly manner. "No threats were used, no appearance of constraint, was there? It was all quite candid and fair?"

But the Captain put in: "Sir, I said nothing about Bloemfontein or to-morrow. I knew that would never move her.

She's quite ready to go to St. Helena or Ceylon or the cage. Out of her own mouth I made her marry me."

The General was still looking at the bride, and the bride began to look a little bewildered. "He came and told me I must marry him," she said, "because I gave him a rose once, and I thought about him, and then he kissed me and told the chaplain to begin, and told me to say 'I will' when we came to that part of the service, and I said it. I couldn't refuse."

"Captain," said the General, "you seem to have taken the girl like you take a koppie—at the charge."

"And what way should a man take a woman but at the charge?" returned the Captain proudly. "If the woman is the woman, and the grace of God is on the man's eyes to see it, then straight on—that's the word! A man should do the woman that compliment—that she's so rare and sweet that he can see no way in this world but with her, and at once. That's my way of looking at it. But now this Commandant man, that was so big of his mouth about the girl that's my wife—now he shall——"

"Stop, Captain," put in the General promptly, laying a kindly hand on Old Fireproof's shoulder. "That's my business: this is my house—and there's a lady present now," he went on, smiling again. "Here, Cerison; there's one thing still—there's your apology to this lady."

Cerison looked our way and his dark face flushed darker, the Captain's face growing harder too. But the bride was too quick for all of us. Looking the General in the face with grave simplicity, she spoke, her tones as clear as her words were steadfastly spoken. "Please do not let him apologize to me for what he did this afternoon. I do not mind. It is to the British Army; to the British Government; to the British people; that he should apologize, for lowering them so far in the eyes of on-lookers. That is where he should apologize."

The General looked at her critically, and nodded his appreciation. "Serve him right," he said heartily, "though it wasn't for this afternoon I intended him to apologize." The General paused, and looked at the Captain for the next.

The Captain spoke instanter. "And for what he said this evening, here at your table, and to your guest, he must apologize, as I do, to you, his host. General, I can see now what I did when I rose at him."

Again the General nodded. "Then you can see that the whole fault lies with me, for not stopping him, the moment I found he was treading on the toes of a guest. So"—and here the General laughed, "if I owe you an apology, and you owe me one, and he owes us both one, besides the one he owes to the Army and the Government and the people: well, don't you think we shall save time by washing out the lot?"

What the Captain would have answered I am not quite ready to guess, for before he did speak a white hand was laid upon his arm. He did not flinch or blink, he still looked straight at the General; but his face softened, his whole attitude seemed to come down from adamant to human flesh and blood, and he said, "On a man's wedding night he should forgive all men he ever fell out with, and hope all men will forgive him. He owes God something, surely, in the minute he's just married." His face was shining—ours were all smiling softly.

Even the Commandant wished to smile, and came over to the Captain. "At least you can believe that I see now what piffle it was I was repeating about—about the lady you have now married. But if you had brought her to the office, I should have seen that for myself."

"Major," ended the Captain in a deep strong voice. "Foul or fair, here's one thing to be said. If I had let her go to your office, I should have had no wife to-night. I've no ground to complain, then, of your part of all this."

"Come now, Captain," put in the Colonel. "Confess fairly why you married her." It should be said that the Colonel knew his man.

"When I was making her marry me," returned the Captain, "I thought I knew well. But now it's all over I can see clearly, and it's something quite different—it's the old reason; the eternal reason. It's because she was she and I was I—that's all."

"Beaten you, Colonel!" broke in the General, and he laughed loud and long. "Beaten you there! And here's the champagne, and now a health to the bride: nay, to them both. A rouser!"

And a rouser it was—even I took wine, for once in my life, on that, wondering the while at the dark fears which had crushed me.

It was Colonel Rostron who afterwards explained to me. "You see, it was all right the moment *he* married her. Any other man would have been Stellenbosched straight. But he's the sort of man Headquarters simply can't afford to lose, so he can do things that would hang another man. That's all right then. Have another drink."

CHAPTER XXIX

OF THE LIVING AVENUE THROUGH WHICH THE BRIDE PASSED, AND
OF THE CAMP-FIRE: AS ALSO OF THE WOMAN GAYNOR

HOW long we stayed at the General's I do not know, whether twenty minutes or half an hour, before the Captain pleaded the fatigue of his bride as a need for taking her back to the Widow le Warn's. When we got into the street, however, we found it full of riders—word had gone to the column of the Captain's wedding, and all D Squadron was here, with half the rest of the column as well, to judge by the press in the darkness. It was one of the Australians who spoke first. "Captain, we've come to the wedding-feast," he said.

"Then when you've got it ready you might give me a call," countered the Captain promptly, whereat the laugh went through the crowd, and one man called out softly, "They will buy 'em!"

Then from the street of Headquarters we turned into the street that went straight to the Widow le Warn's, and yonder, at the other end, three hundred yards along, in front of the garden gate of the house, a great blaze was leaping and sheeting from a captured waggon, which, with its piled-up load of logs, had been brought in and set on fire for the celebration. And, between us and the fire all the way was lined on either hand by mounted men, each with his rifle at the carry, his bayonet gleaming, here eerie in the moonlight, yonder flashingly in the flame-light, the men themselves as they sat—chiselled men on chiselled horses for all movement that we saw—showing like some weird avenue of sculptured centaurs in some ancient temple, looking

down upon us from either hand as we passed, we three afoot, myself behind the stately, white-clad bride and her bridegroom, and the white moon shining down on us, as once it shone on the ancient temples of the gods of Egypt and of Lesser Asia; of Babylon and of Assyria.

Thus in royal wise did this bride pass to her quarters; passed in regal wise unmatched, for all these men who made such a splendid lane for her to pass through were the men who had thronged to the charge, headlong after her husband, in battle against herself. And when at last she came to the gate, and turned her face in the light of the roaring flame, statelily to thank them with a slow bow, they shook the night with a shout that went far out in the feldt to startle the shadows there.

There was no hotel or canteen where the men might buy drink, and yet I saw, by the two other waggons and their loads of fence-posts just beyond the leaping fire, that they intended to make a "camp fire sing-song" of it. And even while I looked, out of the darkness into the flamelight strode half a dozen men, each hung round with water-bottles. "Got it?" cried one or two men near the fire, and by the nods and shrewd smiles of the carriers of the water-bottles I guessed well what it was they had got. This was Rostron's Horse, and that was rum. The men of the A.S.C. were some certain sums richer, and the rum to be issued to the next few columns certain degrees poorer, said popular report. Yet I never remember any column whose rum was not potent enough to cause trouble, if a man drank more than his allowance.

Then the men unsaddled and turned their horses into the great walled orchard opposite, while the most restful souls drew as near to the fire as the heat allowed, and sat down about it, the dust of the road being as welcome a seat as any, though some sybaritic—or cautious—souls brought their saddles to use as pillows, since if you use a comrade's corpus for a pillow, he is liable to move just when you have bullied him into the most comfortable position for yourself.

And, lo, all the girls and women of Mooiburg seemed to have

come into the scene at the shout, it seeming that Rostron's Horse were as much the master-craftsmen with the ladies in a town as with the men on the feldt. But the ladies did not come forward into the full glare of the light. That would have been too open a matter ; all the mystery and the half-light of romance would have been gone in the glare of the fire. Those men, therefore, who had found favour with the ladies stood with them in the half-lighted darkness behind the sitting circle, and as one looked one saw the firelight dance suddenly on fair face and floating hair, bright eyes and soft lips, the face seeming always listening like the face of dreaming youth to what some dark-visaged Irregular was pouring forth of words.

And within no great while here came the General and his dinner guests, sauntering into the circle, making their way to where Mr. Mansel, Mr. McHoy, and the doctor sat on chairs, the first-named as president of the "sing-song" now to commence, and the other two as supporters. It should be added that most of the officers of the column were sitting or lying on the ground right and left of them.

Chairs were brought out of the darkness—indeed, the darkness seemed as it were a store-place whence Rostron's Horse drew whatsoever it wanted for its good pleasure—chairs were brought for the General and the Colonel, while the rest found the dust of the road their cushion, and if the Commandant had done evil that day, he sat out full penance now, in watching this open mockery of all his choicest regulations. But he said nothing, and even smiled like an honest man when, after the crowd had roared its welcome to the General with "He's a jolly good fellow," the next call was for the bride and bridegroom.

Over his shoulder Mr. Mansel spied me lingering at the gate. "Mr. Allen," he cried, "please convey the compliments of the crowd to the Captain and his missus, and say that we require the presence of both at the earliest possible moment, on penalty of otherwise hearing us sing that 'we won't go home till morning.' Tell him that this fire's not near so hot as some he's made us go through"—at which last sally the whole audience crowed and chuckled with delight.

I found the Captain and his bride sitting outside the house on the stoep, where they could see, through the trellised roses, the red-lit scene in the road. They heard my message out, delivered to the letter as I had received it, but then the bride would fain have tarried here in the seclusion of the shadows rather than face that glare yonder. Yet her husband only said, "Liefste, I think we ought to go; they are all so glad," and straightway she rose. "Just as you say, dearie," she answered. They had already come to using loving names to each other.

Out they went, and down the path, and through the gate, and straight ahead, till they stood on the right hand of the president, Mr. Mansel, and up from every side rose an insistent cry of "Speech! Speech!"—"Or sing a song," put in one wag. And then, before the Captain could control his smiles enough to say a word, that same sad wag went on, "Remember, Captain, this is about your last chance to get your say on anything: you'll find the missus will have the floor—and keep it. I know; I used to be married when I was a young fellow, too."

No great joke, perhaps, but the crowd roared, the Captain laughing fairly. "Well," he answered, on the spur of the jest, "don't you think your wife had good cause for having her say, when she found what she'd married? You should be glad she didn't stop talking and take to inflicting corporal punishment on Corporal Hartwell."

The roar redoubled, but so, too, did the cry for a speech. "Speech indeed," retorted the Captain, smiling broadly. "That's a fine thing to ask a man after you've landed him as you've landed me! Here you go and capture a Burgher leader, and then stand by while she makes a prisoner of me. Never brag again that Old D Squadron never had a man taken prisoner. Here's the Captain of it surrendered: here's the Captain of the squadron standing as a prisoner before your eyes. And the top of it all is that he's feeling very well about it, thanks, if it's all the same to you. In fact, he's rather beginning to like it, and if you don't mind, you can leave all your plans for his escape outside: leave them with the bouquets in the barn."

The cries of encouragement went up again, but through them came a voice on the left, from the outer edge of the firelight. "Captain, you're not the only one's been captured. Here's another—and he likes it too! Look at the bonds"—and amidst the roar of laughter one looked and caught the flash of a white arm escaping from the dark hand that had held it and drawn it round the neck of the speaker. It was not the men alone who laughed; one caught the silvery laugh of the women and girls in the shadows too, and it was a woman who cried out then, "Speech from the bride!—the bride!"

Half the throng caught up the words. "The bride! the bride! Speech! Speech!"

At that the bride shrank closer to her husband. But he laughed gaily. "Nay, wife," he said, speaking clear and high for the crowd to hear. "You never feared to face this lot in the field, when they had rifles. Surely you're the best man still, here where they've only smiles and good good-will to you."

"The best will in the world," cried some voice from the throng, and at once the cry was taken up and repeated and repeated from every corner. "Best in the world! Best in the world!" till the bride lifted her face to the light again, and all men saw it shining with happiness.

Thereat came silence, all men waiting for the expected speech. And to all that waiting the bride said only, "I can't make a speech. If I could I would. Besides I did not think it would be like this. I expected—not this. And I am glad, too—I always thought you were all so very dreadful. That is all I can think of to say."

"Ho! More! More!" rose the roar, startling in its volume to any one not used to such men. And over all the din the Captain drowned their words with his answer. "You've had your speech. One day—one day's rations, as we say. Call no more for speeches from my wife: you'll get none. I've already told her she'd better not let me catch her talking to other men."

And before the laugh that hailed this deft return could die

away a clear voice started, melodious and waggish, upon the old song—

“ Her brow is like the snawdrift,
Her throat is like the swan ;
And her face it is the fairest
That e’er the sun shone on,” etc.

And how the whole crowd took it up and swung it forth !—it seemed strange that they should sing so well.

The Captain would have led his bride away, but that Mr. Mansel insisted. “ No, Captain. You have your way in the field, when there’s danger. We’ve got to face the music there whenever you say so. Now you’ve got to face the music here for just five minutes; here where there’s only good-will. For I’ve got to make a little speech from the squadron to the bride, expressing all our triumph that we’ve won again. First the Old Squadron captured her in the field, fairly and squarely. And now its captured her again in the town, fairly and squarely, and she’s had to say, ‘ I will ’ to the Captain, since she couldn’t marry us all. Dash it ! what taking dogs we are, we D men ! I wish I was a nice girl myself, so I could marry the Senior Lieutenant.”

“ After that ! After that ! ” cried the Captain merrily. “ After that, good-night. Boys,” he added, halting the foot he had lifted to turn and go. “ Boys, I thank you ; honestly I thank you, both for my wife and myself. And for all this—your coming here—I’ll not forget. I’ll remember. Good-night now.” And as he ended he took his wife by the arm and led her to the house again.

But as they reached the garden gate, the bride turned, obeying a quick impulse, and said, in that golden voice of hers that reached so clear and far, “ Good-night ! I had not expected it would be like this.”

The men did not shout at that. As if every man there had been her brother, each man answered her with a quick cry of “ Good-night ! ” astonishing me with the grave earnestness of it.

This time I followed into the house, for I remembered that I

had not yet given them a certificate of the marriage, and when I explained this to the Captain he kept on into the room in which I had married them. And it was as we were standing there, waiting for the widow to bring pen and paper, that there entered to us the woman I had met in the path, when I came from my tent to take the Captain to the house of the other woman.

This woman was still dressed in black, though all her primness was gone. The black now was silk of the old-fashioned stiffness that used to be described as "good enough to stand alone." In her ears were gold ear-rings set with pearls. Round her neck was a chain of fine gold which went down to hold a watch in her waist-belt. On the middle finger of each hand was an old-fashioned Marquise ring. The lace about her neck and wrists was real lace and of a good kind, while the buckle of her waist-belt was of silver. Altogether she was such a one as the house-keeper of a good country house would be when my aunt was young.

She entered the room with quiet face, looking neither right nor left, but straight into the Captain's eyes, and coming and standing before him and making an old-fashioned curtsy before she spoke, saying, "We heard the riding and the shouting, and the glare of the fire came into the room where she was sitting and I with her. And her face went white: the gutter drop that is in her was afraid of she knew not what, for the shadows were on her since the secretary told her that you had called to see her, and gone again and she not knowing. And I came out to see what the hoofs of the horses and the shouting of the men and the leaping of the flames meant, and I found that they were all for your wedding. And I went back and told her where she sat, and it is her own fault.

"And so I left her and came here to wait upon your wife that I've waited for so long. Tell her who I am."

All the while this was being spoken, the Captain's face had been as impassive as if it had been of stone. Only at the end of it he nodded, but as if he had nothing to say as to the right or wrong of what she had done. Then he turned to his bride,

whose face showed no weak curiosity, or any other feeling save contented patience, and spoke. "Liefste, this is Gaynor—I don't know her surname, because she was born in my father's house, and her mother was my nurse, and she herself was my mother's young maid for some years before my mother died. And she claims the right to be your housekeeper and instructor in the ancient atmosphere of your new home. And until we go there she claims the right to be your maid and feminine factotum generally."

"I shall be very glad to have her for factotum," replied the bride, smiling softly. "I shall not feel so strange, then, if there is some woman I can ask questions of."

The woman did not smile: she dropped her new mistress a curtsey instead. "I brought my boxes," she said. "The serjeant-major took some men and brought them. I am ready whenever you give me an order."

It was just then that the widow came in with the pen and paper, and at the coming of this outside person all three of them, husband, wife, and factotum, withdrew into reserve again, while I made haste to write out the certificate and be gone.

CHAPTER XXX

OF THE WOMAN SITTING ALONE IN THE EMPTY HOUSE OF SHADOWS,
AND OF THE HORRORS THERE

AS I left the house to go to my tent, the "sing-song" was in full swing in front, and one man, a New Zealander with a splendid voice, was singing "The Holy City" as I have never heard it elsewhere. And I bethought me that, since all the town seemed to be here at the uproar, it was likely that the other woman would at least be still sitting up, if not walking in the garden. And as I thought of her, I began to walk towards her house.

It was but a little way off, so little away that the glare of the mighty camp-fire lit each separate leaf in its hedge, and in the fruit and shade trees showing above the hedge as I came near it. Behind me some new singer was wailing the words of "Genevieve," and as I paused for a moment, looking at the house set in its garden, I could not shut out the sentimentalism which runs in my blood, making me think of the woman within as of a woman in a book of romance ; romance of which the next chapter should be of surpassing interest.

And, because the gate of the garden stood open, eagerness to read that chapter drew my feet again, and I passed through the gate and stood within the garden. The light of the camp-fire was flashing on the walls of the house, and beating in at its open door and windows too, for there was no light of lamp or candle burning in any room of all the house to fend it out. Empty looked all the building ; all silent and all empty ; so silent and empty that while I looked that sense of emptiness grew to a

sense of eeriness, as if some disembodied dread sat and mouthed, mowing and gibbering dumbly, within.

The slow strains of the song came to those open doors and windows; the red light of the merry blaze came, and no answering sense of life made any sign. The house seemed to start into weird sentience in its outlines; ghastly all its suggestions; entering my imagination like a bodied horror, till a great stir of dread crept in my blood and trembled through my joints so that, all to save my credit as a minister of the Gospel—and therefore one armed against the Powers of Darkness—I went up the three steps on to the stoep, and turned along it to look boldly into the room of photos; the room in which the Captain had sat and held his watch while the five fateful minutes had passed.

To the open window of that room I came and looked within, and straightway my breath came in a gasp, my blood seemed to stop, and my heart to flap with fear. For the red light of the camp-fire, flickering and leaping in upon polished chair and table, picture and vase and photo, dancing and dying and gleaming again on each smooth flashing surface within, was also burning and glowing, never seeming to fade or fail, on the face and hands of a figure that sat there so sudden close in front of me that it seemed to flare into my startled eyes, red-lit, and sitting like some goddess in hell, hands clutching each other so fiercely, and face staring so dreadfully, that my scalp froze and my bones stirred within me and I turned and fled.

Not till I was through the gate again, and felt myself once more in the ways where human people walked, could I stop myself, and even then I had to turn and face the house, lest that dreadful sitter in the room within should come behind me unawares. But a great din of shouts and laughter from the fire yonder came to give me courage again, for the men were just then tailing on to a triple trek chain, to haul a second waggon, with its load of firewood, astride of the glowing mass of what was left of the first one. And so fierce was the heat of the burning mound of coals that the new fuel roared into a wide

blaze as quick as if it had been oil. All in one flash, as it seemed, great sheets of flame leaped into the air and tore loose and flew on, far and high, flinging the flashing light over all the town, and making this garden in front of me almost as light as day.

Then, as the flames roared louder and louder, the whole crowd of the men, with ringing, swinging voices, burst into "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," not beginning at the first line, but breaking into it at the Captain's favourite point, the line I had more than once heard him singing as he rode—"For mine eyes have seen the coming of the glory of the Lord."

And that line came with so mighty a music that it drowned even the roar and crackle of the sheeting flames; yea, drowned even the fear that fluttered in my blood, so that I remembered quietly that the figure sitting yonder in the gleaming and the glooming of the open-windowed room must be the figure of the other woman; sitting alone in the first lurid certainty that she was now cut off for ever from him whose form had been the core of every waking dream in her heart for so long a while till now.

"As I have spread, so must I sit and eat,
Dust in my mouth and darkness round my feet."

It was the Captain I had heard quoting the lines: but it was my heart that quoted them to me now. If this woman had sinned, she was paying the price, full tale and swinging weight. Could poor humanity do more? Could inhumanity demand more? With a thought that was a prayer for her, I stepped through the gate again and along the path to the house.

As I crossed the threshold, into the room, she was yonder in the same attitude yet, and with the same aspect, all as I had seen her through the window. She had not moved. Neither my going nor my coming had stirred her one jot, though she must have heard both plainly.

Neither did she stir now as I crossed the room and stood beside her. Not till I spoke would she speak, and even then she did not move her face or figure, but still stared dreadfully

out towards the fire and the singing. "Madame! madame!" I said. "Surely you are not alone in this echoing house?"

"Yes, I am," she answered, speaking low and quick and thick, like a sleep-talker. "The people of the house are gone to the crowd and the fire and the singing. The woman who was my maid came in and told me of the marriage, and left me to go to the bride. My secretary is staying with the matron of the hospital, for as soon as she told me that you had been here with *him*, and that she had gone to her room to make herself presentable before coming to tell me—well, she said she was going straight back to England to-morrow; she would not stay another minute with a woman who called her such dreadful names, names that a Christian woman, a respectable woman, never heard of before, and she would go and stay with the matron of the hospital, who wasn't a whited sepulchre like some people; like me."

"Then you are here alone," I began, intending to beg her to come out into the garden and walk about awhile. But at that word "alone," she sprang up to her feet, flinging her arms upright in spasmodic frenzy, and then clutching her temples with both hands, closing her elbows before her face. "Alone! Alone! Alone!" she screamed the words in sheer ecstasy of hysteria. "Alone! Alone! Alone!"—and the scream went through my blood and unmanned me in that horrible house of flickering flame and shadow. In my terror I caught her arms. "Don't!" I shouted. "Don't!" and the ghastly room rang with the echoed "Don't." "Sit down!" I shouted again. And all the rooms of all the house, the rooms I could not see, but did dreadfully imagine, echoed and laughed with a mocking "Sit down!"

But at my touch she threw my hands off. "Don't touch me!" she screamed, her hands out before her like claws, her face distorted with piteous fear. And then, in the same breath, she broke down to a horribly slow, low wailing. "Oh, you are a minister! Can't you help me? Can't you help me? Can't you? Can't you? I'm lost! I've lost! Can't you help me? Can't you?"

"I will!" I cried, but she did not even hear me, for in a flash she was upright again: upright and laughing! "Alone? Alone? I'm not alone!" she screamed, the tears flashing down the horribly laughing face in the flame-light. "Alone! I shall never be alone again till I'm dead and my memory is stopped at last. I'd give my beautiful hands and wrists to be alone: see what I'd give!"—and she held her hands and curved her wrists to show their grace and beauty. "He told me once that I ought to look at my hands and wrists in the glass, they were so beautiful! That's what's with me: remembrances like that. That's why I'd give my body and my soul to be alone from memories: to be like the dead, if I was only sure the dead are dead and never remember. Remembrance!—that's hell: and I'm all one remembrance now!"

She broke off with a quick scream, and clutched her head with outstretched fingers, as if a shot went through it, while she bowed herself like an old, old crone and went weaving to and fro for a minute, before her voice came again, as if in hopeless agony. "Remembrance! that's all I've got, where I might have had *him*, making fresh remembrances for me all the days of my life; if I'd had the sense of even the coldest thing that crawls; a snail! A snail has sense enough to draw in its horns when it comes against a stone wall. I hadn't. I came to the stone wall in him, and instead of drawing in I swore I'd break it down. And all the time I knew in my heart that God Almighty couldn't break that stone wall in him, except by destroying him too, and yet I said *I* would—that's the fool a woman is! That's the fool I was! That's the remembrance that's with me! That's the reddest thing that's mocking me now. Oh! Oh! Oh!"

Many doctors have told me since that when a woman of the proudest class does break down, she is more shocking to see and listen to than other women. I only know that I hope never to see another woman as she was then, going to and fro in that room like a tigress behind bars, but her only fierceness a fierce agony of despair that recked of nothing but its own pain. "A stone wall!" she cried, *in a half-whisper that went hissing*

across the room: "That stone wall was his honour: his patriotism. Honour with him was a madness worse than Quixote's. It was a wine that he'd sucked in, in that old house, till his blood was drunk with it, and he could see nothing except through the mist of it. And his patriotism was like a flame inside him, that burned whoever touched it. But I'd thrown away my honour the moment I first saw him—Why should he keep his when I'd thrown away mine! And what was patriotism if it was to take him away from me? Besides, I gave way, part way, when I saw him so stubborn; so blazing stubborn and so blazing handsome. I said if he'd only wait till the disasters came that he preached of, then he could go out as an officer and not as a trooper. My God! My God! when he found I was such a guttersnipe he couldn't keep his colour: he went grey and sick like an old man. He turned away and went, for he couldn't say a word. Oh, where did I get that guttersnipe drop in my blood? Where is it? Where is it? I'll tear it out! Let me tear it out!" And she clutched at the bosom of her dress to tear it open.

"Don't!" I cried, catching her hand. "Don't!"

"I will! I will!" she screamed, struggling with me, and in her frenzy she threw me off as if I had been a weakling. But as she did it, she forgot, and fell in the same flash to moaning. "Honour!" she moaned, "What's honour! I was married a month to that old fool and then I was a widow. But I hadn't waited even a month—I hadn't been married a week before we met *him*, as we went along by that little river in Wales. Damn Wales! Why doesn't God sink it in the sea, deeper than all its mountains piled on top of one another!

"And he was riding home from the haunted lake in the haunted mountains, along the haunted river to his haunted house, and as soon as my husband introduced us I saw the contempt in his face for a woman like me, that had married a broken old man for his money. And I looked in his eyes and I saw myself as he saw me. Oh, if only my heart didn't hurt me so!"

Full half the horror of that last cry lay in her tone, as if a

scream were intended and only a monotone could come out. And of a sudden she sat down, as she had been sitting when I first came in, and her voice came again in sleep-walker's tones, save that there seemed a lewd sarcasm ringing in it. "It wasn't two days before I'd waylaid him with a touching tale I'd concocted, of how I came to be forced against my will to marry my husband, and what a poor little martyr I was. I must have done it splendidly, for he believed it there and then, and put a halo round me, and made me a saint:—the fool he was! And then my husband was killed, and I thought the thing was done and we'd only to fall into each other's arms—the fool I was!

"Can't you see what I'd done?" she half screamed, starting up and facing me, the tears springing afresh down the distorted face. "By my lies I'd made him set me up as a saint, and when I went to him, to be loved like a flesh and blood woman, he'd set me up as an ideal and was worshipping me as a saint, like some thick-headed fool in a romance. Can't you see what I'd done? I'd either to confess myself a liar, or be worshipped, when I was on fire to be loved. Oh! the fool I was! the fool!"

She flung herself to the open window. "Hear them singing! That's for his wedding that would have been my wedding too, if he'd only loved me instead of worshipping me. You're a minister! Why don't you teach men to be men and not fools? Women are not angels; they're just women; animals; like men. And when my temper and my flesh and blood would come out, then he'd draw in, for his ideal was hurt, instead of gripping me and making me do as he would. Surely I was worth as much as the young horse he was breaking in, or the shooting dogs he was training? Then why couldn't he have set me right and made me go the right way and stick to it, just as well as a colt or a dog? I was worth it. But he was worshipping the ideal I'd painted of myself, instead of mastering me, till I could have horsewhipped him for not horsewhipping me. He has the rage in him to do murder; I've seen him in it, and he looked splendid: why couldn't he have bullied me into terror once, so I'd always

be able to trust him to master me and make me walk as he wanted? Then I'd have been the happiest woman alive instead of what I am now"—and she threw out her hands as if all things were ended.

What she would have said further I do not guess at, for just at this point I felt that someone was entering the room behind me. I almost jumped with the certainty, and as I turned I saw that it was the woman Gaynor.

The red light was on her face also, and I saw that her primness now was but suppressed fury. She said no word of greeting to me, nor any of preliminary to the frenzied creature beside me. Straight to her late mistress she stepped, and without a word clutched at her throat, furiously unsnapping an emerald-studded chain from amidst the laces there, and snatched it away, dragging with it the great enamelled locket which it carried, and which had been hidden in the bosom of the wearer. "I looked in my box for it to put on the bride's neck!" she cried angrily. "I knew where I should find it when it was missing there!"

The cowering woman made no attempt to keep the chain from being snatched from her. "Take the trumpery gew-gaw," she said wearily, as she saw Gaynor open the locket to see if its contents were safe. "A child's plaything: a piece of ground felspar, isn't it—your fairy token to the brides of your trumpery gentlemen of descent? Keep it by all means, and I'll send you a tin trumpet and a child's rattle to go with it."

"Yes," retorted Gaynor grimly. "And you'd give your soul, if you had one, to have this round your neck to-night as the brides of all the generations of the Sons of Grono of the Golden Belt have worn it, from his fairy bride to this bride yonder to-night. Sit you down now in the shadows that you've come to, and think and think again of the time you lifted your stick to strike the man that lay asleep with fever in Bloemfontein. That will be payment enough."

With that word the woman Gaynor turned and went out of the room, still giving me neither look nor word nor sign, and while she went, and while one could still faintly catch her foot-

step on the verandah, the woman in the room with me neither stirred nor spoke. I myself listened still longer, straining my ear to catch her foot on the path, and then the closing of the gate.

The closing of the gate I did hear, for she was a trained servant, and therefore tidy, but when I then turned to my companion, I started, for I found that the click of the gate had been as it were a signal for the last and most horrible phase of her breakdown. She cowered in the seat of her chair, her fingers spread like claws before her face, but yet the flickering eyes staring through them, shining like terrible jewels in the lurid light, while her voice was the most piteous I have ever heard. "Oh! oh!" she wailed, slow with sheer terror; long drawn out, and low with hopelessness and pain; the very voice of one utterly broken, utterly desolate, lost forever here and hereafter. "Oh! oh! oh!"—that whining, dreadful sound, as if an ecstasy of pain were killing all power of screaming; and even when that one repeated word rose to a scream, the scream was still attenuate and thin, as if she quaked in dread of some blow for screaming, and yet could not wholly suppress it. "Don't let that dreadful woman come near me! Keep her away: she's going to take away the fairy gift! Don't let her! Keep her away!"—and at that the scream came so horribly that I first shut my ears, and then, for very dread, put out my hands to lay hold on her and make her stop.

But that brought worse. "Oh, don't beat me!" she wailed. "Oh, don't hurt me!" And she threw herself on the floor and crouched with her distorted face between her elbows, wailing in abject terror.

I could stand no more of the horror. "Help! help!" I shouted. "Is there no one in this horrible house?" And echo shouted its answer—"No one in this horrible house?" I could no more. I turned and fled for the doctor.

As I came near the crowd I saw that the doctor's chair was vacant for the moment. "He has just gone in to see the Captain," replied the man I questioned, and I kept on after him into the house.

As I came to the door of the sitting-room, I saw the doctor standing by the window with a half-emptied glass of wine in his hand. Beyond him were the two Lieutenants, Mr. Mansel and Mr. McHoy; Mr. Mansel's glass empty, Mr. McHoy's barely touched, for he was a teetotaller. In the midst stood the Captain and his bride, and facing them the woman Gaynor. And as I came in she had just thrown the chain and locket of the fairy gift round the neck of the bride.

Before I could interrupt she had stepped to an open box by the table and had lifted out something else that I first thought was a silken shawl and then a silken banner. "See!" she cried, casting it wide for the bride to see. "This is the banner of the name that's yours now. This evening you must wear it as a shawl: to-night it must be your coverlet, and when you are buried it will be your shroud, but not till you've worked another like it for your son's bride after you. See the swords in it: three broken swords; all broken in one battle, two of them taken from slain enemies. Wait till you hear the story," and with the words she gave the banner into the Captain's hands.

I had heard of the Captain's "fifty-thousand-a-year look," as his men called it. I saw it then, as he threw that silken symbol of ancient prowess and ancient pride over the shoulders of his bride, and neither in his face nor hers was there any trace of that smirking shamefacedness which in our generation so often mars such a moment. "Liefste," he said, "when you have heard the story you will understand."

"I do understand the real part of it already," she answered, softly, drawing the corners of the silk, with its barbaric gules and argent flashing in the light, across her bosom. "I feel what it means," she said.

Then they all seemed to be aware of my having come in, and all looked towards me. "I am only come for the doctor," I answered. "Doctor, can you come at once?"

"Sooner than that," retorted the doctor, incorrigible yet, "for the sooner I go the sooner I'll be back to the fire and the songs again."

So I turned and went out again from that scene of light, and love, and eagerness for the future, and led the way to the darkness and the horror of the house of the shadows, where the other woman lay distraught and screaming.

Thank God for doctors and nurses—and for sleeping draughts.

CHAPTER XXXI

OF FIVE SHILLINGS A DAY, AND WHAT IT BOUGHT FOR THE EMPIRE

THE Captain's bride did not go down to Cape Town by the first train next day : it was the other woman who went, accompanied by a nurse, while the Secretary travelled in another carriage of the same train. "Of course," said the doctor, "she seemed to break down with a bigger smash, and bigger splinters flying, than a middle-class woman, that's had her soul flattened to tissue paper between the backs of tracts and books of conduct and moral precepts all her life, denying her very heart's blood for fear of 'What would people say?'" This one's had the run of her eyes and appetites all her life, and so you were bound to hear the timber smashing when she did go it mad and blind. That's the way this new generation is brought up in what the newspapers call Smart Society. There's still three or four score families left that have an ancient and honourable tradition of decent upbringing, and decent living, that they stick to. But the rest : the ruck of them that sweat through a London season, they have money and that's all, and they pay a crew of unbath'd servants to look after their children, and want to hear no more of them, till the girls are ready to 'come out' and the boys to 'go out' into the world.

"Padre ! you've seen what the boys are, four out of six of them ; in this war you've seen it. And the girls ; well, this woman's one of them at their best, because she's not ashamed. But at their worst——!"

"Well, I fear I do not want to have much to do with them, best or worst," I answered.

"Ah, wait till ye get a fashionable living in town," retorted the doctor. "Then I'll hear ye again on the same subject."

I shook my head. It was no use talking.

Now, that was the train in which the Captain had demanded that his bride should go down, but events had altered his desire. For Rostron's Column had suffered so heavily, especially in the operations of the last month, that it was necessary to refill its numbers, and for that purpose it was to lie over for seven days, in its camp at Faal Koppies, while the fresh squadrons were being overhauled and assimilated. Thus the Captain could stay with his bride at the house of the Widow Le Warn, and still believe that he was not abating one jot of his duty to his country.

But upon that point hear the doctor, as he was telling it to the P.M.O. "You see, the morning after he was married, the Colonel comes to him, and tells him that he's seen the General about it, and it's all right; he can have a month's furlough; or, rather, to put it officially, he's to be sent down the round of the coast ports, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town, to pick up specially choice recruits for the regiment that's been doing so well. To which the Captain promptly replied that he thoroughly appreciated the kindness of it, but--and then there was a lot of pretty words, but they all ended on the one thing; he wasn't going to leave the field as long as he was fit and well. It would be time for ease and comfort when the Empire was at peace again.

"So there you were, but I put a flea in the Colonel's ear. 'Leave him alone the six days,' says I. 'Leave him alone till the night before we trek again, and by that time his wife'll have begun to take effect on him. He'll see that this world didn't begin and won't end with this war, and that we've got to keep up with the marrying and giving in marriage, or else the next generations will come short for their wars in the future. Then send him off for three weeks; give it to him as an order when he's sitting with his wife. He may be a bit stiff the first minute, but take my oath that he'll not be on parade to march off with the column next morning. His wife's not the sort of girl a

husband would be very eager to leave." And so the Colonel did as I said, and on the morning of the eighth day behold, the column was gone one way from the Faal Koppies, and my bold Captain and Mrs. Captain were in the train going another way—down to the coast was their way. He looked doubtful, and his eye was a bit restless, maybe, but he went, and that was the main point."

But though the Captain did thus go, and though he stayed his leave out, to the last day, yet he shirked no jot of the task he had been officially sent on. Prompt to the day he came back, but he brought with him a hundred and fifty odd of good and workmanlike-looking recruits for the regiment, all men who had served in various other corps, and all having the air of picked men. I had no sooner seen them than I congratulated him upon his work as recruiting-officer. "Every man seems as if he were just the very man for the job," I said.

He answered me dubiously, and with more than one shake of the head. "I don't quite know," he said. "I took what care I could, but after all you can't always tell, and I may have rejected better men than I brought up. It's like horses—I've been riding horses so long, and so many, that I don't know now whether a horse is good or not till I've tried him. And the same with men—I've been getting men together, and knocking them into shape, and leading them into the field for so many years, that I'm not very ready to be very sure which is a good man or not till I've tried them. You can look at some men and feel pretty certain that they'll be good and workmanlike fighters, like a collier's bull-dog or a quarryman's terrier. But again, there's other men that make your easy condemnation an enduring astonishment to you. Pretty well every time I've taken a new gang into action I've had some such astonishment. The fellows that were straining at the collar the whole way through were never, all of them, the men I'd expected to be there: some were; but others would be men I'd never thought of. Think for yourself; take my squadron: there's T——t, and T——r, and H——n, and H——l, and H——d, and N——e, and one or two more of my best fighters,—who'd have ever dreamt of

picking them out as men that simply can't be hustled off their ground by any fire or any show of numbers you like? No; some good men are tall and some are small, and some look men and some look Punch's curates, but it's the soul inside that counts; that's the one thing that's alike in them all and makes them good fighting men. I've often been asked what's the best size for recruits, and I always say there's only one size; but that's the size of the soul in the man, not the size of the man's soul-case, his corpus. And the only way we have of finding out the size of any man's soul is by trying it in action."

Thus the Captain on the subject of recruits, following my first remarks, and as to another subject, the subject of the other woman, he did not ask after her; he knew, having regard to the fact that I had taken him to see her, that I must needs have seen her since then, yet he made no sign. That leaf of his life was done with, and he turned it down with a will.

Besides the recruits, he had with him four Lieutenants belonging to the column who were returning from hospital. More to the point, however, he had accomplished the usually impossible by bringing up horses and saddles for the men, so that he arrived as leader of an immediately effective force, were it but organized.

As to that, the General soon set things in motion. The column was far out in the feldt, and instead of returning to the railway for stores and provisions, it was to be provisioned by a convoy which would leave Mooiburg three days after the Captain's arrival. That convoy would be none too strong, and the Boers seemed to be intending to attack it, so that the General was glad at heart when he saw the Captain come.

He wasted no time. "Go to the detail camp," he said. "You'll find some of Rostron's men there; fellows off short leave and out of hospital. Get them—there's forty odd of them—and get horses for them out of the remounts here, and camp the whole lot outside the town here. You've just three days to knock them into shape, and then you'll have to go as part of the force with the convoy. I expect the Boers will try to get the convoy as it passes Nassie's Neck, so look out."

Three days is not long in which to deal with two hundred men who are all strange to each other, and knock them into shape for battle. Yet the thing was somehow accomplished. Acting non-commissioned officers were appointed, the force was divided into two squadrons, and things were so driven that the third morning was wholly spent in the various exercises of attack and defence, and the third afternoon in musketry practice at springbuck. "It wouldn't be long till we'd be not too bad a handful to take on," said one of the four Lieutenants to the rest that night. And the rest agreed.

As to myself, I had lent the officers my tent, since they had none, nor were there any in store at that moment for them to borrow for those three days, while each night it rained. This caused me to join their temporary mess, and as I remembered that they would have no tent while they were with the convoy either, I resolved to lend them mine, as well as my Cape cart and horses to use on trek; which, again, meant that my Kaffir servant must go also, in order to drive the cart and to bring it back when the convoy returned.

But when I made the offer to the Captain, insisting that he should accept the loan for his Lieutenants and himself, he had his word ready, "Padre, one never makes a good meal off the trimmings alone. If you remember, it was a boiled leg of mutton, as well as trimmings, at the 'swarry.' So you must add yourself to the loan, and we'll accept it so quick that you'll require the seven days to think it over in."

"Oh, I am to be the boiled leg of mutton, am I?" said I, hugely delighted, for my aunt is always insisting that I can never see a joke in time. And I was so tickled at that way of putting it that I agreed to go with great pleasure, if it could be arranged.

"I'll see to that," returned the Captain, with his usual promptitude. And he did see, so that on the morning when the convoy started I was of its company.

We were timed to start early enough, for there was only one spot where a weak convoy could camp in anything like safety on its first night out from Mooiburg. And because the Captain's

force was not part of the regular force of the convoy, the Major in command ordered the Captain to form the advance and right flank guards. This was because those were the danger-points, the points most exposed to the enemy's snipers, or even attacks, and if the force was to be weakened by having men killed and wounded, the Major thought it as well that the loss should fall upon his temporary allies, rather than that his permanent force should be permanently weakened. "Wise Major—from his point of view," commented the Captain, with a grim little smile. "It is as well that it is not the point of view of all of us, though."

So the Captain had thrown his advance and flank men well out to give the waggons a couple of miles clear, after they should leave the town, and we saw the waggons trek for a mile or so, but then they halted. We wondered at that, yet, as there are many causes of delay, we sat with what patience we could muster for a full half-hour. Then the Captain rose—"I'm just off back to see what's the matter," he said, as he mounted.

I went with him, for I had been riding with him from the start. But when we got to the waggons, and made inquiry, the transport conductor said only, "It's the new yeomanry. They are rear-guard. Go and look at them." And we went.

This yeomanry had come straight from home, and had been at Mooiburg for a week when they were detailed to this convoy, and as we rode into their lines now the sight was too grievous for glib words. I looked at the face of the Captain as he looked, thinking to see it black with anger, but instead of anger I saw nausea; sheer nausea.

And he spoke, reining in his horse and sitting and surveying the scene. "Is it not piteous beyond invention that such a thing should be possible! If a hundred orators on a hundred platforms set out to tell the tale of the criminality of those in power, could they say anything so damning as this one scene is? We have been at this war for more than a year, and now, when more men are wanted, this is what they send from Home. Through all the rest of the Empire the call has been answered by men so fit and resolute that the Boers are saying already that

it is the Colonials who are beating them. And from Home this is what they send—this !”

“This” was beyond my power to depict. If I say that the commonest exaggerations of the drill sergeant were here literally true, I am saying something which the civilian cannot appreciate. But it is literally true that amongst these men, all being paid five shillings a day because they could ride and shoot, there were men who fulfilled the old sarcasm that they did not know which end of the saddle went in front, for in the huddled groups that represented the troops there were several saddles still with the cantle in front. Very few had their kits on right, and fewer still of the men seemed to look at the horses with anything but dread.

Some of the men were still in the picket lines, almost in tears with helplessness, while the few non-commissioned officers who knew their work were sullenly busy, helping the useless specimens to get saddled, or to unsaddle and saddle rightly. And all the ground on which they had been camped was dotted yet with nose-bags, bandoliers, and even very rifles, totally forgotten by men so obsessed by that dreadful wild beast, their horse, that all points of their equipment not equally terrible to them were forgotten.

I heard the anger gathering under the Captain's voice as he broke out, grim and slow. “Think of our artillery: think of our infantry: think of the men that lie dead round a thousand koppies; nay, think of the first year's Yeomanry, and then think of this! By those dead we know that the breed has still men of the old ring amongst it, and yet that ineffable gang in power at Home can only send this sort of thing to finish the job those dead began. Padre! if I live through this war I'll write out just this scene; this one scene in every detail—it is enough to hang whoever is responsible if there's any sense of justice left in our people. But come, padre, you know something of saddling a horse and so do I. Let us get down and help to get this lot into shape for marching, or we'll be here till to-morrow.”

We had both dismounted to begin, when here came the General, and with him the Major commanding the convoy. I

looked at the General, and his face was grey with wrath. "Captain," he said, "what do you make of this lot?"

"I am just going to make it, as much as I can," responded the Captain grimly.

"Then I'll go—so you've got a free hand," said the General. "Come, Major," he went on, and away he rode, the Major saying not a word, but going.

At the moment I did not fully appreciate the significance of the General's words, and so I stayed, and began to help one fellow, who promptly dropped his hands and began to whine out accusations against the horse. But I will not detail our squabble, for almost in the next minute the Captain's voice rose over it all from where he dealt with another wastrel, a couple of lengths from us, and three from the squadron. "So you don't know which end of the saddle goes in front," he was saying. "And yet you swore, when you enlisted, that you could ride and shoot!"

The man was on the point of denying it, but the sergeant who was bullying the next man turned and struck in. "Yes, sir; he was always knocking the horses about. He said he'd worked in the 'bus stables, and he'd been a marksman in the volunteers, and look at his rifle now, with the bolt down."

The man had his rifle slung over his back, and I saw that the bolt was hanging out of the breech. But I saw, too, that the Captain just caught hold of the rifle and jerked it off the man, but in such a way that he sent the man headlong into the dust. Then, as the man lay and stared at him in horrified amazement—"Get up, and saddle this horse that you've knocked about," he said.

The man was not quick enough at rising. "Ah!" cried the Captain, "let me help you up!" And in a trice he had him by the arm with a grip he had learnt somewhere in his wanderings, a grip that made the man squirm and shout, "Oh! Oh!" and writhe to his feet at once.

And still the Captain was not done. "Now you take hold of the saddle with *this* hand," and with the word he took the man by the right wrist in another peculiar grip, so that the man

burst into a frenzy of beseechings. "You noble warrior!" answered the Captain in his grimmest voice; "you could lie to the recruiting officer; you could swindle the nation out of five shillings a day; you could knock poor horses about; and you could put men's lives in danger by coming into the field with them where you are not fit for the duty. And yet you cannot even keep a stiff upper lip, and take what comes, now when you are found out! You swine! you dog! Saddle that horse in three minutes, or I'll man-handle you!"

The man was literally trembling with fright, and almost sobbing with pity for himself, and by a desperate effort he did saddle the horse right, for he turned and saw which way I was saddling the horse I was at, and so managed to copy me that he saved himself. Then the Captain gave him his rifle and went on to the next man.

That man did not wait for the Captain to speak. "Please, sir, I never told them I could ride or shoot. I wanted to join the Rifles, 'cause I've a brother in them, but the sergeant said, 'You join the yeomanry; it's five bob a day instead of one.' So I joined. They never asked me if I could ride or shoot, and the officers don't know enough to find me out or teach me."

This reference to the officers was the last straw. "That is the truth: that's where the latest responsibility does lie," replied the Captain, and he turned to where the Captain of this ineffable squadron was waiting at the head of the huddled troops, squealing out orders like a peevish-servant-girl. And, as birds of a feather flock together, this Captain was attended by Lieutenants rigged out like himself in all the—to them—useless lumber of sword and Sam Browne belts, revolver, and all the rest of it; the rig in which they had been photographed in heroic attitudes, for the benefit of their snob selves and their snob relations. But now they had added cameras, which they wore slung over their shoulders, to photograph the Boers they'd kill and the prisoners they'd make.

Up to these ignoble travesties strode the Captain. "I've got the advance and right flank," he began, "and they've been

yonder on the feldt this hour past, the saddles on the horses ; waiting for this rear-guard to come out."

The figure that was Captain of them stuck out his stomach—he thought he was sticking out his chest—and answered out of his dignity, beginning with a snarl, but ending with a whine, as he watched the face he was speaking to. "I gave the order : they knew the time. It's not my fault."

"It is your fault !" thundered the Captain instantly. "It is your fault, for you're Captain here ! If you woke up this morning and not one man knew his duty, it's still your fault, for you're standing there, figged out like a figure at Tussaud's, instead of being stripped and teaching these specimens of yours to saddle and mount. You——" But I cannot go on and report the rest : it was too strong, too forceful, too masterful in word and idiom for my pen. He spoke of them as shameful ones who took the name of yeomen upon them where they should have kept their native designation of gutter-snipes. He told them that better men than the first-year Yeomanry never went into the field, if they had but had officers to match ; and that worse men than they who came out to replace the first-year men had never been seen—as yeomen.

The things he said to the men were strong enough : the things he said to the officers should have made honest men expire with shame as he said them, adding that they were not honest men, or they would have refused to continue as officers, once they saw how incompetent they were. And he wound up by ordering them to go and help the men still in the lines to get saddled. Moreover, they went : he was one of those who are obeyed.

Then he turned to the troops on parade, and began to get them into shape. Once I saw him knock a man down, and always he was thundering at the incompetent. But where he passed, there the troop had assumed shape, and at last he stood out in front. "Now we'll have a try," he said, and he gave the order to mount.

Some shaped well enough there, but some—nay, baboons climbing barns was the wrong simile, for baboons can climb

One or two gave up in despair till they saw the terrible Captain approaching. But at last all were mounted, and the Captain gave the word to march, leading them round outside the town. lest the Burgher girls and women should see and send word to their kin on commando to mark this convoy down.

Before he drew off the ground, however, he sent word to the Captain—who was still struggling with the derelicts—that he was going on, and would do rear-guard with the troops he had: they could bring on the lag of the herd when they had mounted it.

The Lieutenant he sent the message by desired to warn him. "Sir," he said, "his sister is very high in Society. She got him his commission."

"She's not so high as her morals, if she got him his commission," retorted Old Fireproof grimly. "How many men are to be killed through his sheer uselessness?—and that's murder in her and him. What of the honour of the Empire when the Burghers chase him and his men like hares, and take prisoner what they don't shoot? She and he, and the criminal she seduced of the commission, and the Government which allows such traffic in the honour of the Empire and the use of men's lives, all share and share alike in the blood of the men of this squadron that are to be killed before this night drops down. Have you thought of that?"

The Lieutenant went without a word of answer.

Thus that rear-guard marched out of its lines, but when they saw it go, and when they heard the message from the Lieutenant, its officers left the men they were with and rode after the squadron, for fear they should be captured before they could catch up with it in the feldt. Whereat the men they left sat down, and were afterwards gathered into the detail camp, they and their horses and equipment, there to be scorned by better men themselves, bullied by worse men, and to have their equipment stolen, and their horses given to others, while they themselves were the helots of every fellow who had a task he could make them do for him. Yet still they drew their five shillings a day as yeomen.

Said the Captain to me as I rode out beside him, "Inside a few hours this rear-guard will be under fire. Imagine these men dismounting and mounting again under fire! And do you know what I've been thinking of, from the moment I clapped eyes on this gang of swindlers? Of my wife!"

I almost drew rein in my astonishment, for all the while, as I watched him bringing order out of chaos, I had been thinking only of the incalculable value which can lie in a single man, when that man is such a one as Old Fireproof. And now that man was confessing to an Achilles heel. "Of your wife!" I repeated blankly.

"Of my wife!" he reiterated. "Five weeks ago, to be killed or not to be killed was not worth troubling about: it was only the chance I'd been taking all my life. But now, I have my wife, and life and death are a different matter, and all the while I was roughing this rearguard into shape a thought was nudging me—'Is this the day and this the way I am to be killed at last, just when I'm beginning to see where the real world lies; the world of wife and child; the world that links the future with the past? And am I, for the greater mockery of human dreams, to die now by the failure of fools?' 'Died Abner as the fool dieth'—Mr. Allen, that phrase has been rankling in my heart through it all, breeding a bitterness that will not down. To die yonder in front with my own fellows, good workmen doing their work in sound style; that's good enough: there's no complaint to make. But to die in the ruck and the muck of these specimens, bunched and chased like sheep by half a dozen snipers, to die for no need, but only in making good the criminal conduct of those at home—that is the thing that is still biting at me.

"My wife!—the sweetest woman on earth!—and all her happiness, all her future, at the mercy of these ineffables! The enemies of the Empire are not all in the field against it. The worst—because the most dangerous—are in the high places at home. Look again at this gang behind us!"

CHAPTER XXXII

OF THE MAN WITH THE PRESENTIMENT, AND OF A TRUE
HUSBAND'S FEELING FOR A TRUE WIFE

WHEN the Captain ended, in that iron way, of the thought that had been in the core of his mind, I could make no other reply than—"If we do come under fire,——"

"It will be something to remember," tacked on the Captain. "But I'll just spread out this mob into rear-guard shape, and then I'll go and get a dozen or so of the old hands, out of my own fellows, and set them to shepherding this lot, and teaching them what they can before the bullets come."

While he galloped forward to his own men, the whole convoy being on the move again, now that this rear-guard had shown up, I remained with the reserve troop and speedily found myself being closely eyed by the brother of the sister who was high in Society; by the fellow, that is, who was Captain of this "yeomanry" (!).

With each minute of Old Fireproof's absence this Captain's feathers were lifting again, and by the time we had gone a couple of miles, to where from the first high ridge we looked along the broken ground we had to trek through, he put his horse alongside mine, screwed a monocle into his eye, and spoke. "Who is that?"

I knew well that he meant Old Fireproof, and I answered with some quietness, saying, "One you must have heard a deal of, if you heard anything at all while you were in Mooiburg. The General would have told you if you had questioned him."

And in any case, he will soon be back here with a few of his men. Ask any one of them, and they'll soon tell you."

"But I mean at Home—who is he at Home? I don't mean out here in this beastly country," answered this warrior-leader of like warriors.

"I am afraid we do not trouble much, out here, what any man is anywhere else but here," I answered, still quietly. "We are all here to end the war, and we think of men accordingly. And this man's name is one to conjure with amongst us; that you may guess from the General's telling him to do what he liked with you and this squadron. When you are taken prisoner, the first thing the Boers will ask you will be where he is."

"By Jove! you know. That's this beastly country!" answered this Captain, and then he seemed to fall a-thinking. Whereat I, having said enough to let him see what the feldt thought of him, said no more, but looked anxiously for the return of my friend. And the reader is to remember, if he truly wishes to appreciate the situation, that this specimen at my side, having been appointed Captain of Yeomanry, took rank over any mere Captain of Irregulars, like Old Fireproof. This man, being of the Yeomanry, had his commission on official paper, duly signed and sealed with a goodly red seal. Old Fireproof, being merely of the Irregulars, had no commission to show for it, or anything else but an entry in Army Orders, and when the war should end, he would not have so much as a scrap of paper to vouch for him; wherein he was so much worse off than any one of his own troopers, who would at least have their "discharges" to show. Still further, this Captain of Yeomanry would officially retain the honorary rank of Captain after the war, while Old Fireproof would become plain Mister. It will be seen that I, too, had something to fall a-thinking over, as I waited the return of my friend.

The way from the high ridge was downhill to a stream, and the waggons went at a good pace. Moreover, as the waggons had a pretty good start of the rear-guard already, there came back a message from the Major to bid us hurry and close up to

our proper distance. But we had no sooner tried to hurry, by crowding into a trot, than men began to wobble in their saddles, and to clutch at mane and saddle-bow. Nay, some wobbled clean off, and from the rearmost troop came a despairing message that we must go slow, for if they trotted they fell off.

"Take that message on to the Major!" cried this Captain hysterically, the moment he received it, and while the Lieutenant who had left his troop to make the request carried it on as a message from his Captain to the convoy commander, that Captain cried "Halt! Walk! March!" to his men. It seemed that he had been looking at a drill-book at least.

When the message reached the Major in command, he, with ironic appreciation, sent it on to the advance guard exactly as he received it, and it was then that Old Fireproof came galloping back with some fifteen of his men. To each Lieutenant of the other troops he appointed one man, saying to each much what he said to the first: "Now, here's a man to help you through to-day. Remember he's your father and mother, and your very grandmother, for knowing what's good for you. And if he should tell you that the troop must go with horses' tails first, don't you hesitate—give the order. Take it from me, as straight as you can, that you'd better give the order. And if you listen to him, and ask honest questions, you'll know enough to astonish yourself before he's done with you."

The rest of his men he so distributed that each small party had its mentor, while he kept three men to ride with the reserve, where he himself was riding. And, like as before he had put a shape on the huddled parade of the squadron, so now the whole regiment began to move in more workmanlike fashion, and a deal faster.

Moreover, whenever the waggons came to bad going, so that they moved slowly, the various parties of the rear-guard were kept at it, mounting and dismounting, off-saddling and saddling up, to give the duffers confidence, and to let them see that the horse was not a personal enemy. And I thought, as I watched,

that if he could have had them seven days he would have made something of even them.

Thus we came to where we halted for noon, and not a shot had been fired, so far.

As soon as the halt was made, my friend ran an eye round the distribution of the rear-guard and saw that it was well. "Come," he said to me then, "we'll go across and see our own squadrons, and get a mouthful to eat."

At the Cape cart we found a couple of our Lieutenants, routing out food-stuffs for a bite, and one of them spoke up. "Are the babies all tucked up and safe asleep then, Captain?"

"They are yonder, but I think they will be some time before they sleep again," answered the Captain. "I think they've had their eyes jarred too wide open. How have you boys gone on so far?"

"Not too bad. You'd think they'd been working together for a month," replied the Lieutenant. "I think they won't do too bad if it comes to a bit of scrapping this afternoon."

"Thank God for that!" returned the Captain fervently. "But I hope we shan't hear a shot to-day. To-morrow these Royal Ineffables behind here will be acting as main body and escort to the guns, so they can't let us in. But to-day——" The rest was a significant gesture.

"And there's all Commandant Malherbé's stamping-ground between this and to-night's camp," went on the Lieutenant, cheerily. "The beggar usually 'personal-ly conducts' columns through his ground, doesn't he?"

"He does," admitted the Captain.

"Then suppose we send him word that he can't very well take us on to-day, because we've got a lot of babies with us, and they might cry?" pursued the sprightly Lieutenant.

"He'd tell you he was at the taking of the Irish yeomanry at Lindley, and he didn't see any babies amongst that yeomanry," retorted the Captain grimly. "He'd tell you he hadn't seen much better men anywhere, if they'd been better handled, and he'd want to know why these yeomanry were babies, while those were men, seeing that they're both called yeomanry."

"And then we'd have to explain that those were first-year men," went on the Lieutenant, "while these are——"

"Five-shillings-a-day men," struck in the other Lieutenant.

"No; we'd have to explain deeper than that," said the Captain still grimly. "We'd have to tell him that the breed at Home has gone soft, and that, because the war wasn't over in one big battle and a march-past, the people have got tired and gone to cricket."

That seemed too near the truth for further jesting. We all fell to food in silence.

The halt was but for an hour and twenty minutes, because of the time lost in leaving Mooiburg, and after he had watched his advance and flank-guards working for half an hour, the Captain fell back to see to the rear-guard again. "We're in Malherbe's country now," he said as he reined round. "Look at it: it's promising ground." It was.

When we came to the reserve troop again, the man who had been left to ride with the Captain spurred out and spoke to my friend, in a language that I guessed for Spanish; and the Captain answered him in the same tongue. Yet I guessed, too, that though the first part of their conversation was question and answer anent these yeomanry, it soon fell to other and private things; things of some other country and of happenings years ago. And I was right.

For, in a while, when the talk was done, and the man had reined back to his post, and the Captain was crossing to the right flank of the rear, the echo of the talk came out to me. "Padre," said the Captain to me, "that's something I don't like. The man who was talking to me so long—he's a man that was a comrade of mine in an affair out of Guayaquil, years ago, and I only saw him once after that till I met him in Cape Town the other day, and brought him up as a recruit: I want the Colonel to let me have him for a Lieutenant, now Kingstone's away hit—I've got a vacancy, you know—and he should be all right and happy. But he's not—it's a woman, and he doesn't know where she is—and just now he fell to talking of the deaths of men we used to know; fellows who used to be with

us in different little affairs. He seemed to have all their deaths in his mind in a heap, and with them the sadness and the uselessness of it all, and the barrenness of life that ends in such deaths. And while we talked I remembered the same thing in other men, especially when he went on to recall all the chief things he'd done. He spoke again of the time he headed the mutiny on the blockade-runner, because the skipper was turning back, and how he took her in, with a pistol at the ear of the mate, making him con her through by guess and lead and echo, with a fog as full of holes and tatters as a Kaffir's blanket for their only help. Many another touch-and-go and little triumph he bethought him of, too, again, and, padre, when a man of that sort gets talking of things of that sort, his own doing, well, his ghost is walking before him, waiting for him to come, as we say in my old home."

"Do you mean that he has a presentiment of his death, and that it will happen?" I asked, a little astonished. "I did not think you were superstitious."

"Neither am I superstitious," replied the Captain. "I am speaking now of something I have noticed, more than once; a deal oftener than once. And I draw no theory from the fact that some men have the presentiment of coming death, because, for every such man there are a thousand killed without any presentiment. But here's the point of this about him; he ended by hoping that there would be no fighting to-day, because he felt a chill in his blood at the thought of it. And that's so far from being the thing you'd hear out of him, in the usual way, that I told him I'd relieve him and send him back to the advance, then if this rear-guard did get into trouble he'd be out of it——"

The Captain broke off, and I spoke. "What did he say to that?"

"He refused to go. 'No, I'm with this rear-guard,' he said. 'If I'm to get it, I shall get it, here or there. Besides, I can't leave this lot: I feel it in me, holding me here.' And, padre, as I say, I've seen the thing before, and if he's not dead by dark, I shall have a long belief shattered."

"And if he is dead?" I prompted.

"Then he'll be dead," answered the Captain dogmatically. "But the thing I'm thinking of is—shall I be dead, too? and, if so—my wife? padre, my wife? You see, if this rear-guard does come in for it, then I'll have to be here and do what I can."

I looked at him, and all I could say was, "Why, sir, have you a presentiment also?"

"None," he returned. "Though as to that, I've just said that a thousand are killed without it, for one with it. But I'm not troubling about being killed. I'm just thinking about the effect of being killed. Until that night when I married my wife it was all so simple. I'd be killed and I'd be buried, and that's all. But since then: say I'm killed now, with my wife left behind me, and perhaps, please God, a son—what of them? Padre, I'm remembering the Reserve men who came out with the first battalions to the war. They fought well; I saw them with the steel on, going up the koppies at Belmont, but I know now there must have been a black fear behind the hearts of many of them; not fear for themselves, but for those they'd leave behind them if they got it." (Here I should say that to "get it" means to be killed.) "I think even more of those married Reserve men now, than I did at the time, though I reckoned them well men then."

"Then you have found your marriage a happy one?" I said, gladness rising in me at his good fortune.

"I have found it far more than that; far greater than that," he answered fervently. "Padre, I have had a deal to do with women in my time; a deal more than the deacons would endorse. The sweetest girls and women have never shunned me; and, worse still, the sweeter they were the greater the danger to me. But I've never had to do with a woman in my life, in that way, but I found myself left with still a deeper and truer sympathy for womanhood; the womanhood that has no claim or weapon save in the sweetness and the gentleness, the tenderness and the longing for nobleness and purity, which do exist in women, and are the finest essence of womanhood at its

finest. And that was the man in me that you married to the prisoner that night: a man who was very far from being a stranger to women, even at their absolute closest, and who held them always high for their fineness, seeing what was flesh in them and what was spirit: what was Nature that worked in them as it would, and what was soul that worked in them as it could.

“ But since I married I have found myself going from astonishment to fresh astonishment at the sweetness and the glory of unspoilt womanhood in her ; my wife. It is not love in me ; at least, it is not the love one reads of in books ; it is something higher than that ; it comes nearer to reverence than that. And there’s something greater than either of us in it—there’s Nature.

“ Padre, when you come to be married you’ll see it—in fifty little things your wife does and thinks and feels you’ll see she’s but the unconscious vessel in which Nature is working for its own inexorable ends ; working in the woman, your wife, and you seeing it, and the woman, your wife, acting it and not seeing it ; and the pity of her unconscious helplessness, of seeing her as the clay in which Immutable Force is working to its own design, heedless of her own ideas, will come to you far oftener than the truer thought, the thought that it is the price we pay for life itself, that it is the concomitant of our existence as sentient beings, and that, as it is God’s Law at work for good, it is holy. You’ll see then that your wife is but a link in the endless chain of the generations since the human race began. And then you’ll see how small you are, and your wife is, compared with the tremendousness of the Purpose which is working through her and you ; the Purpose to which the feelings you think most sacred in you are but contributants ; and you will draw your wife closer to you, to help her and to help you both in the Vastness in which you find your two selves alone, that Vastness which is the ante-room to the great Secret—that Vastness which spreads sudden about and above you, lone and illimitable, like star-lit midnight in the desert, when, quietly, you ask yourself, To what end is this world ?—and Life and Time, to what end are they ?”

I did not bethink me to try and answer him, for my thoughts were gone wandering after the lights his words had opened before me, and silence went with them. Silence was upon him too, for his own thoughts were away on one of their eagle sweeps, and we might have ridden far without a word had the rousing lain with us alone.

But it did not; from far in front came the noise of scattered shots. I looked round at the Captain, and instantly he was the man of action again, looking towards the shooting, and conning the movements of the advance guard, which could be seen. The sound grew wider. "There's business yonder," quoth the Captain, rousingly. "Come, padre," and away he went at the gallop, to see his new men and temporary squadrons through their first fight.

That was always a great point with him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

OF THE CAPTAIN'S QUESTION, DEMANDING UPON WHOSE HEAD LAY
THE BLOOD OF THE DEAD; UNFIT MEN DEAD MISERABLY;
AND OF MY ANSWER, THAT IT WAS THE PRIESTS HAD SINNED

THE shots we heard were but the preliminary of a fusillade that was kept up for twenty minutes, first at the advance guard and then at the right flank, and though to me it seemed fierce enough to be the herald of a downright attempt to capture the convoy, yet the Captain saw no such danger, apparently. All his aim seemed to be to husband his men and even his ammunition, while he sent back twice to beg the Major to send a gun forward.

Such conduct in him, so different to the headlong attack I had always associated with his name, set me a-thinking, and I wondered for a breath or two if his marriage had ended his gallantry in battle, and blunted his appetite for danger.

Something of my wonder must have been in my face, for in a pause of his galloping from troop to troop, and party to party, he looked at my face, and then broke into a smile. "Ah, padre, there's very little honour and glory, of the newspaper kind, in this business. But I can tell you that there's no more difficult and dangerous job in the field than this convoying of supplies. We've just enough men to stand off an open rush, and not enough to go out and take on the attacking force and rush it. We've got to keep trekking, or else camp in this bad ground to-night, and be sniped and harried all through the dark, as helpless as an elephant stuck in the mud. So first we've got to keep trekking, and second we can't go out and beat attack by

counter-attack—those two points are the two jaws that hold us fast. Therefore the enemy have merely to choose their ground and slate us every mile we go. They've every chance to kill some of us, and we've hardly a sporting chance to kill any of them in return, unless we happen to whang one or two flat with shrapnel. It's merely fine sport to them, whether there's only one of them, a dozen, a hundred, or five hundred. We can do nothing but grin and bear it, for if we did laager up and go out after them, they've still got the start of us. But here come the guns at last."

The guns indeed were here, and a wonderful difference they made. No sooner did they burst a shrapnel over a koppie or a donga than horsemen rushed hurriedly away from it, and then the pom-pom rattled its vicious string of shells after them to hasten them still more. All told, they seemed wondrous few for the noise and bluster they had made. "Seventy at the most," was the Captain's estimate, before the guns opened, and he did not raise it after seeing the numbers that scurried away.

"Well," said the Captain, to me, as the guns limbered up and returned to the rear. "I'm glad they tried us. It gave me a chance to see how these new men shaped. And they shaped well; shaped like men. They seemed happy, too, at the way things were done. That's good."

As for me, this check to the enemy gave me a great relief, for now I thought that they would trouble us no more that day, though when I questioned the Captain he had no view either way. "One can't tell. They may and they may not. And if we hadn't such a lot of wastrels as rear-guard one wouldn't trouble to think of it. In any case, we shall see as we go on."

Just about an hour before sundown we did see. We had come to a line of broken koppies which crossed our route, and at our feet lay two or three miles of a flat, with another ridge of broken koppies beyond it, parallel to this one. In that ridge was the water we needed to camp on, but all along the right hand of the flat was high and broken ground also, which would have to be cleared if the enemy were in it, and it was in the thick of that ground that the ominous "click-clock" broke out again.

"Hear that click-clock?" said the Captain—for we were well in front this time. "There's many a man of ours that's been all through the war and he'll still tell you that it's the Mauser that makes that click-clock. If they'd been shot at by our own people, as often as I was when I was a scout, they'd know that our own rifle makes the same sound. It's a sample of the knowledge that some of our people lay down as law so freely."

All the while he was speaking the Captain's face was to the field in front and flank of us, and especially watching the dust of the bullets as they struck near us, for by the short streak they made he got the direction of the shooters, just as he guessed whether the range was near or far by the sound of the bullets. "Padre," he said, "they've given us law and now they're going to give us the serious call." (I think this was a joke, for me, or so intended, playing on "Law's Serious Call." But I had not time to ask.) "This is just the place and just the time for a good bang and rattle at it, and perhaps a rush in at dark. I think you'd better keep your eyes open for the doctors and the ambulances. Malherbé must be here in full."

In truth this was no twenty minutes' affair like the last. In twenty minutes it only seemed to be swelling still louder and wider, and the Major's face was serious as he spoke to the Captain. "They seem to mean business here. Do you think your new men are good enough for pushing through, or shall I send the M.I. forward?"

"I think my men can do all that's wanted," returned the Captain with a little smile. "They're not new to the game, and by the feel of them, so far, I don't think I can lead where they won't follow. And we must push through, for the only water for camping on lies in those koppies, on the other side of the flat yonder. There's a farmstead with a big dam there, between that highest koppie that comes out to the front there, and the lower one to the left of it. So if we get to that high koppie the Burghers will have to go away out of range, and then, if we can get the pom-poms up there, they'll have to go so far it won't be worth their while to hang about any longer, and you could

un-laager and come straight across to camp. There's just time to do the job before dark, if we bustle a bit."

The Major nodded. "That sounds good enough, if your men are good enough. And you should know them."

"Thanks," replied the Captain. "I think they'll be found good enough."

And so indeed it proved. I need not here detail the whole process by which the high koppie was reached and taken. The reader has already followed Old Fireproof through fighting enough to know his manner. Here he had the tremendous advantage of the two field guns behind him, training their fires upon the exact points he had pointed out to the gunners before starting. Besides, the Major sent the pom-pom, with its escort of veteran M.I., in support all the way. In barely half an hour the plan had been carried out, and the convoy was stringing out from its laager to cross the flat and camp.

Surely the danger of the unpromising day was over then, I thought, and the presentiment of the old blockade-runner brought to naught. He seemed safe now. The last waggon was trekking down the slope into the flat while the sun was yet some little while to sinking. The guns threw a few shells rearward at likely points, and then limbered up and went away, with a rush and a cloud of dust, to pass the waggons and throw a few shells forward at the enemy in front, skulking in cover at sniping range there, before it should get too dark. And as the guns went, the Captain of the rear-guard screwed his glass into his eye and shouted to his men, "Trot now!"

Now it happened that, at that moment, the men my friend had left with this Captain to guide him were gone to ride round the rear parties to see if any danger threatened, and to consult with their comrades there. Had they been still here, with this reserve troop, things might have gone differently. As it was, the two nearest flanking parties of the rear, seeing the reserve going at the trot, started into a trot too, being in duty bound to keep their distance by it. And that was the moment when the seventy we had dealt with, earlier in the afternoon, hearing the guns and scenting fresh chances if they could join their

fellow burghers, came up with our rearmost parties and opened fire.

I had stayed with the guns when Old Fireproof rode off to carry the farther ridge. I had still stayed in the same spot when the guns limbered up and went, for a gun position is usually a good place for seeing the whole field. Now therefore, while I looked towards this new firing, I had the figures of three riders dark between me and the great red disc of the sinking sun, as they spurred at top speed from the rear to bring the reserve back a little and open it out for those behind to fall back upon.

They came to where they had left the reserve,—for it was the old blockade-runner and his comrades—and when they saw that the reserve was gone they kept up all their speed towards me to ask after it. I had already guessed who they were: by their headlong riding I knew they were none of the new “Yeomanry”: and I rode towards them, pointing along the road after the convoy. “He trotted on after the waggons!” I cried as soon as they could hear.

“Thanks!” shouted the blockade-runner, changing his direction and pressing harder yet. I followed with the other two men, for it was likely there would be some difficulty when this man overhauled the reserve, and so I should be an independent witness. Down the slope we went.

When we overhauled the troop I was glad that I had followed. This bold rider swept round the corner of the bobbing, wobbling troop like a wolf round a flock of strayed sheep. He stood on no parley with the fool Captain. “Firing behind! You’re wanted back on the ridge for the others to fall back on—your flank parties have gone on and left the rear in the air. Put the troop about and gallop!”

The Captain fumbled with his monocle, trying to screw it into his eye, while he cried out, “But the waggons are going yonder! See them! I must keep my distance with them. I’ll dismount here, and they can fall back on me here!”

The man’s dark face poised for a breath, as if he would burst out in hurricane curses with the contempt so richly deserved by

a Captain who could talk of dismounting there, three hundred yards downhill of a ridge. But, instead, he turned from him without a word of all the wrath in his face, and shouted to one of his comrades, "Ride and tell the Captain"—and then to the troop, "Come on back, boys, and help your chums out of the hole. Files about! and come like blazes!"

To do them justice, the men were eager to answer the call. Clumsy as so many were, yet every man put his horse about as quickly as he could. "Here! Here! you men: damn you!" cried the Captain, spurring and jerking his horse round to stop them. "I say! Stop there! Hold on, you!"

The blockade-runner swung his horse athwart the nose of the Captain's horse and whipped out his long Colt's six-shooter. Over his shoulder he called to his comrade, "Jackson, lead the troop, and gallop! Gallop!" Then to the Captain he cried, "Try to stop that troop from going back to save the others, and I'll down you, clean down to hell, all standing."

The Captain looked at the man's dark face, with the poised six-shooter alongside the cheek, and saw the smile of utter fury which made it almost shine. "Come on the troop! Gallop!" cried Jackson, and away went every man,—though some fell off in the first dozen lengths—and the Captain still looked at the face and the pistol, and sat and said never a word.

"Now," spoke the man, "you can go to the waggons, or come to the fight; but if you interfere I'll beat you to death with my six-shooter. Remember!" And with that word he whirled his horse and laid after the troop like the wind.

I followed hard after him, not wasting time on that Captain. But—as I heard afterwards—he did go to the waggons, riding till he found the Major, to whom he told his tale in these words: "Hi! Major, there's a man, by Jove, and he's taken my men away."

To which the Major, eyeing him quietly, replied dryly, "Has he? Then you go after him, and when he's done with your men perhaps he'll let you have them again. But go quick!" At which latter hint the Captain did go quick and came back to look for his men.

Meanwhile I had followed the troop and found myself busy all the way, helping poor unfortunates in difficulties with their horses, so that I should never have overtaken it in this world, but that the blockade-runner had found a position and dismounted the men to hold it, so that the rear parties could fall back on it.

By this time, however, messages were coming from party after party, beseeching help, and, more significant still, praying for the ambulance, while riderless horses, chased by clumsy figures afoot, told of one of the causes of demoralization in the firing line. Ten minutes more, and the Boers would be sure to rush this helpless rear-guard, and then——!

“Now hold this position, Jackson,” cried the blockade-runner. “Shoot any man that bolts. I’ll see what I can do yonder,” and away he went towards the firing.

Jackson began to go along the line, making the men lie into cover, and seeing that they uncovered the back sights of their rifles and had their bandoliers open. I waited irresolute for a minute or two, and then mounted again to go out and help the men who were chasing their horses, sending them to the reserve troop under Jackson, making that the stronger against the coming rush.

It was then, as I looked anxiously towards the camp to see if help would be here in time—for the bullets were thickening all over the ridge—it was then that I saw a troop of horsemen coming that made me sigh with relief. They were no more than two dozen or so, and they were strung out like steeple-chasers, but my heart knew them who they were, and whose that figure was, a dozen lengths in front. “Old Fireproof! Old Fireproof!” I repeated to myself, as if the very name were a talisman.

He made straight for the troop in position, and before he could ask a question Jackson had reported. “Flanking parties went on by mistake, sir. The rear’s fast, and the Boers are flanking it. Erlas is gone to try and get the fellows out and fetch them this way.”

“And I remember we can’t flank the Boers on the left here,

because four wire fences come together in the only strip of galloping ground," tailed on the Captain, as if the whole problem needed stating. "We must get away by our right in any case, so watch your left. I'm going to your left front there to begin withdrawing. Come on, boys!" And away he went with his steeplechasers, into the flare of the sunset sky.

"He's got a job: a whole big job—and ten minutes to do it in," commented Jackson dryly to himself, as I rode past him in wake of the Captain.

Here again I came upon men driving their horses, or chasing them before them, towards camp. The men left in charge of the yeomanry seemed to be doing their duty like men, holding the ground with such of their charges as could mount and ride at a pinch, while they sent the utterly useless ones away to the waggons, if they could reach that safety, for few of them, best or worst, had any idea of how to hit a mark with the rifle. But the Boers were working nearer and nearer, almost in open scorn, and on the left, to which we were riding, a small party of them, twenty or so, had come so close that they were already shouting "Hands up!" when into the scene rode Old Fireproof and his men, swinging in a little from the left, as if they were part of some force outflanking the attack.

I was too far behind to see the details, but I remembered Old Fireproof's motto, "When you charge, charge as if the Lord God Almighty had given you the word, and remember that your only safety is to win." The party of Boers were too few, and this dramatic turning of the tables too sudden, for them to stand against it. Had they lain to it and kept shooting they might have done well enough, but the fatal instinct, bred by guerilla work, to recoil from the face of a resolute offensive, destroyed them. The best of them, half a dozen, lay to it and shot well; the rest were caught mounting, and so were no more than a mob of turned rioters charged by the police.

I reined in at the position the few yeomanry had been holding. They were some nine all told, exclusive of the seven killed and wounded, and of the soul of the defence, Erlas. He indeed was

already shouting to another of the men. "That's done, Graham; now you let a couple of the fellows lead or drive the horses, while the rest of you carry the wounded. The dead can lie till more men come. Tarrant, go and tell the skipper where the groups are. I'm off to this next lot to tell 'em the skipper's come," and with the last word he was mounted and gone.

I went after him, but not at his headlong pace; I had no spare neck in my pocket if I broke this one. And when I was some half way to the next group I was hindered as well, for I saw a man of the useless ones, whose horse had run this way before he caught it, and now that he had caught it he had tried to lead it. And, because it had not followed freely, he had turned round and faced it, and jerked on the bridle-rein, after the immemorial custom of fools, whereat the horse had straightway stood fast, after the immemorial manner of horses, and so there they were now, the man with his slung rifle tangling his legs, and his arms nearly stretched out of their sockets, he stiffly pulling one way, and the horse, with neck stretched and fore feet planted, resisting the pull.

"Stop pulling and go up to him and pet him!" I cried at once.

"Stop pulling!" repeated the man, in tearful scorn of such a lunatic as I. "He won't come now when I'm pullin', an' if I stop he'll go right back and back, clean into the bally Boers. If only they'd learnt me how to shoot, or how to ride a horse, the man wouldn't have sent me to run away and play because I was in the way. Or if they'd given me a blessed horse that wasn't such a blessed mule I'd pet him all right. Come up, you blessed beggar! Or if I was only in the infantry where they *don't* have to run away! I'd make a good foot-soldier, said the man when I fell off this afternoon. Are you a-comin' up now?"—But there he broke off.

Then he began to sway on the rein, and the yellow light of the afterglow on his face showed a trickle of tears falling down his cheeks, while his voice came out despairingly, "Oh, if I was only any good!" he wailed. And even while he yet spoke a bullet came and dropped him like a bullock in the shambles;

taking him through the forehead as the poll-axe takes the bullock, and the red was on his forehead and the quiver in his limbs; so that I saw he was beyond all help of my dismounting, and I could only lift my cap and say one short prayer for him.

Then I left him and went on to the rest, and already his horse was quietly cropping the grass beside him.

Within a little distance I came to two groups close together, but I did not see Erilas. And of the nearest group the man in charge had just been hit, whereat those who should be shooting had collapsed, and lay expecting they knew not what of fearful calamity to come. It was well that Old Fireproof and part of his men spurred here to them then.

"Half of you get down and shoot," cried the Captain to his men, as he leaped to the ground. "The other half help to get these fellows away: they can carry their wounded as they go."

The whole party fell to work on that order as if bullets were not. Some shot, some slipped the blankets from under the yeoman's saddles and laid the wounded in them, and then pulled at the unwounded, making them cease fire and put up their rifles and stand to their feet, and take hold of the corners of the blankets in which the wounded lay, and start away to the rear with the burden. Or they put the reins of bunches of the horses into their hands and started them off with those, working exactly in the spirit of men saving sheep from a flood.

In five minutes that group had been dealt with, and the Captain was leading away to the next.

But half-way across I heard Old Fireproof break out—"Ah! here come the old M.I. and the pom-pom. Now the Burghers will get away if they're wise: they're too few to take on the old M.I."

And presently the Burghers were wise; for the steady veterans of the first year M.I. went at it in that methodical fashion of theirs that counted so well. "Come, gentlemen, we can breathe our horses now the old M.I. are in," said the Captain. "And the Boers know it: hear their fire slackening? Now let us gather the yeomanry, ready to get home to camp."

It was then that he had time to notice me. "Ah, you safe,

Mr. Allen?" he said. "This is killing work on good men and good horses. And there's no satisfaction in it, even when it's done, for there is no need for it at all. If things were as they should be at home, such miserable work as this would never have to be done. I hate a waste of men and horses like this. If the M.I. had had the rear to-day, or my fellows, there'd have been no graves to dig to-night, except, of course, in the case of what you may call accidental hits. This is just so much murder, done on us here by the people safe at home." He was the expert again, pondering the day's work.

I shook my head. "It was a sad mess: a bad business," I replied. "And the blame lies with this Captain."

"Nay, the blame goes deeper than that," demurred my friend, rousing. "The blame lies with the Government—lies with the men who schemed and worked to get hold of the power of the Empire; to get hold of the offices of Ministers, and then could only potter us into this war, airily starting the engine and then scurrying hysterically from wheel to lever, clutching and jerking and letting go, and gasping out excuses and denials as things went smash and smash. The blame lies there, with them, if it does not lie deeper still with the nation that would let such Skimpole amateurs come to office over it; for if the breed were still sound no Cabinet would dare do such a thing as this, first bringing us to such depths for want of common business sense, and then, at our need, sending us out such travesties of troops as this 'yeomanry' and their like!"

That was going to the foundation of things quite after the Captain's wont, thought I. And truly I could not stand against it. "I fear the people are themselves to blame in great part," I answered slowly.

But not slow came his answer. Prompt as the report of a rifle came his question. "And who are responsible for the people there? Is it not their teachers? And who are their teachers? Are not the ministers of God the teachers of the people—in the last resort—in the one great thing that counts—in character? Padre, if the ministers of God left all else to preach right and truth; to preach a clear, unwinking moral strength; would the

whole nation dare turn its back on them and bid them get down and go? If all the ministers of God at home stood up and said, 'This war shall not be, or that war shall not be,' then would this war or that ever happen? It would not. But do the ministers do that? Do they not take their national morality from the newspapers, while they busy themselves with the outside of the cup and platter, if not with the loaves and fishes? If they all stood up and said, 'These men or those men shall not govern the race, because they are not worthy, for they are not in deadly earnest,' how long would these men or those men keep office? Padre, padre; are the ministers of our religion wholly innocent of this blood so miserably shed here to-night?

"I tell you they are not, for had they done their duty: had they preached right, and fiery right only, then the nation would not have dared send out such unfit folk as these. It would not have dared to offer dress where its best gold was none too good for the debt. It would have searched itself and sent its best instead of its worst. Padre! the blood of these unfit men lies not with their Captain and those who appointed him; not with the Government or the laymen of the people; it lies with the teachers, that is, the priests, of the people; for the priests are the interpreters of God, and God demands earnestness, thoroughness, fitness; demands the full strength of a man in that man's deeds. And by these unfit men, dead here beside us, ye are judged—and found wanting."

I looked at him in the dusk, and the last livid hue of the west filmed his face stone-grey and bitterly stern as he turned his eyes upon me, where we rode knee to knee. Round about me on the darkling ridge I saw ghostly groups that bore the wounded by, or stood and coned the dead. The shots had ended, and the cries were still; very solemn seemed the glooming world; and in that strange, still quiet, that drops upon the feldt with the first dark, the stern judgment of the Captain seemed a record that would be final against us. Quietly my answer came. "I fear me it is our fault—our grievous fault. The sin of this waste of men lies at our door. For we should be as a flame amongst men, burning out all smooth sloth and

glib pretence, instead of a softly modulated voice intoning lulling phrases and easeful endorsements. Yea, the blame comes back through all degrees of men to us, the priests. We are the men who have sinned."

And, though I have often pondered that answer since then, yet I do not withdraw it. I write it here, and I let it stand.

CHAPTER XXXIV

OF DEAD ERLAS AS WE FOUND HIM, AND OF THE WORDS THE CAPTAIN
SPAKE, WATCHING THE FACE OF THE DEAD IN THE MOONLIGHT,
AND LOOKING BACK THROUGH THE YEARS

AMBULANCES had come out in wake of the pom-pom, and now they were going to and fro, picking up the wounded, leaving the dead to the light mule-waggon, which had been hastily off-loaded and sent to bring them in. And while they were thus busy the Captain had perforce to wait, so that we two dismounted and sat down, while the men helped with the dead and wounded, searching hastily, for dark was dropping down upon us like a curtain, and whatsoever was not found now must lie till morning.

It was but a short while till the men began to gather to us again, and about the time they were all here, yeomanry included, the monocled Captain found us and came near, riding softly and making no great noise. But when he dismounted and saw that he had come first to Old Fireproof, and that my friend's face was towards him, he half turned, and would have gone aside a little, save that the men would have seen too plainly that he feared the presence of good officers. And, as if that thought pricked him and made him desperate, he turned again and came near and spoke complainingly. "I say, that man of yours threatened to beat me to death with a six-shooter if I meddled with my own men, by Jove."

In the gloom Old Fireproof did not seem to rouse. "Did he?" he answered, quietly and a little wearily. "Then it is a good thing you didn't meddle, or he surely would have done it. I know him of old."

The answer seemed to take the monocle-man in the wind, and to make him half hop back, as if he had seen something that would bite. But—again for fear of the men—he had to make some fight for his position, and he spoke up shrilly. “But what price me, by Jove?”

And still the Captain sat quiet in still contempt. “None, in South Africa,” he said; “for in South Africa there is no lower coin than a ticky—a threepenny bit. Even at home you are cheap enough, God knows, for every amateur strumpet and semi-detached wife in society has one or two like you to get commissions for, now that a commission is the shibboleth.”

The poor fool was feeling desperately at bay. “Is it? Well, a commission is a commission at any rate, as your fellow shall find out as soon as I see the Major. I’ll have the beggar court-martialled.”

The Captain’s voice seemed to waken with a little grim amusement. “If you are wise, you’ll keep out of the Major’s way for a while or two. He’ll probably be wanting to know how you came by such a butcher’s bill. And in any case my man’s promise to beat you to death will come out in the court of inquiry on you, when Headquarters send down to find out how you lost one man out of every four of your number, either killed, wounded, or taken and stripped as a prisoner, while you yourself did not come on the scene till it was all over. Did you think of that part of it?—or did you think it was all over, once the Boers were gone and the dead were gathered?”

The fellow was hit by this unexpected aspect of the affair. His whole pose in the dusk showed it, and it was a breath or two before he spoke; his voice all querulous. “It’s all your man’s fault. He wouldn’t let me have my men!”

“Wouldn’t he?” returned the Captain in slow and quiet mock surprise. “And yet he used to be such a kind-hearted man. I’m sure that, if he’d only thought of it, he’d have sent back to the shops and bought you a whole nice box of men, tin ones, made in Germany, each with a little tin gun on his shoulder. And if they got knocked over you could always stick them up again, not like those on that waggon, or in these

ambulances," and he pointed to them as they rolled slowly past us along the road to camp.

Limply the other made his last return, half turning this way and that the while, and fumbling at his eye with his monocle. "It wasn't all my fault. I had one troop already safe with the waggon and your man would come and take them back. If he hadn't taken them——"

Old Fireproof rose and laughed softly in contempt. "You wear the stars of a Captain on your shoulder," he said. "You have a Captain's commission somewhere, and yet you are not ashamed to stand up and say that you let a trooper from another regiment take your men from you, and work them through a fight, while you were—you know best where. Your own words size you up. You were the Captain, and if you were fit to be a leader your men would never have left you and followed a trooper. They wouldn't have done that unless they saw that he was the better leader. For there's good enough stuff in them if you were Captain enough to reach it. But you're not, and the man was, and so they followed him; for the breed will always follow where the best men lead. Get to hell out of this: get away to your tent: get away and hide your head in the blankets for fear of the ghosts of more than the dead—the ghosts of the dreams your mother dreamed when you drew the milk from her breasts, if she were an honest woman; and the ghost of the man that you might be, haunting the thing that you are."

Then, while the man stood dumb, Old Fireproof turned to the men. "Mount now, and we'll get home to camp. The dead we'll bury in the morning."

It was not till our horses were in motion that I spoke of a thing that had come into my mind. "And Erlas?" I said. "I do not see him here with the men."

"No, but some parties have gone on in," replied the Captain. "In any case I gave order that if he were amongst the killed or wounded I was to be told at once. So we should find him in camp."

"And if we do, then what of the presentiment?" I asked.

"I do not know; except that we are no way certain that we

are done with it yet," answered the Captain. "I have seen a man come home from a stiff fight, and in galloping to his picket-peg his horse came down and killed him. Death comes as it will, and not as we expect it."

But when we came to camp we found no Erlas. Though we enquired high and low, he was not there. "You go to supper, padre," said the Captain. "I'll just ride back and look for him."

"Nay, I'll come," I said.

One of the men, who had come from New Guinea with Erlas, saddled his horse again and rode with us. The M.I. and the gun had returned to camp, and the feldt lay dusk and empty before us as we went. The moon, rising behind us, threw our shadows in front of us, and the shadows were not more silent of words than we three men. Not till we reached the ridge did I speak, and then it was only to tell where I had last seen Erlas, and how he had dashed away to help the next group.

"Then we'll begin from where you last saw him," said the Captain.

We found him about half-way across from that place to where the next group had lain, a dead man beside his dead horse, as we could see by the look of them before we had dismounted. Indeed, so plainly could the practised eye of the Captain see it, that for a breath he sat stock still in the saddle, looking down at the moonlit face of the dead, before he said, quite quietly, "So, this was the spot then, was it? instead of that baked Plaza, where they stood us against the wall, the firing-party in front of us, and offered us handkerchiefs for our eyes. I told you then that there was no certainty in it, but I doubt if either of us thought that South Africa would be the land, and this the spot."

Then we dismounted, and the third man laid his hand on the flesh of the dead; on the breast and on the throat. "Yes," he said. "He's gone: this is dead flesh."

The Captain answered no word to that, but he knelt and took the right hand of the dead in his, and his voice came soft and sorrowful seeming. "Aye, old man; and is it all ended then;

is all the doing done? And the wandering—is it over now, here in the cool and the dark and the stillness? So long so unquiet, are you come to the quiet at last? Is it all rest now, after such bitter unrest? And the pain—is the pain quite eased that bit to the bone? Cool and dark and quiet—Erlas, it is very far from the brown Mogls here; far too it is from the white walls by the dark Pacific, where we looked at the ordered cities and planned disorder; but does it matter which the place is, when it comes to the cool and the dark and the quiet of the grave at last? I think not. You are knowing now, and I am still this side of knowledge, but I think not. Aye well, whichever way it is, lie quiet now; sleep well; it is not worth while fretting over. The moon has dimmed her silver none; the wind has not stirred across the feldt—what need we trouble, then, if naught but we does trouble at our passing?”

He fell quiet a moment, and then, still quietly, he turned to the third man and spoke. “Ride back to camp and get a pick and shovel. I’ll bury him here; he shall sleep where he fell. That’s a soldier’s right, that we all claim while we are living, though after we are dead——?”

“Right,” said the man, and went.

There would be some while to wait for his return, and so I sat me down, holding the rein of my horse, as the Captain did his, both of us watching the face of the dead. And after we had sat thus awhile, silence upon the living as upon the dead, low and slow the Captain’s voice began again, speaking the thoughts as they came to his heart.

“Aye me! I was asked once, a few days before I started for this war, why I did not stay at home, and dine well and sleep soft and live a flunkeyed life like—like, God wot! *a gentleman!* ‘Think of all your comrades,’ she said, ‘all killed; all dead; all buried in all sorts of places, with just the sand or the sod above them; nothing to mark where they lie even. They might as well have never been born, or have been wild animals, for all the mark there is above them to remember them by.’ She spoke with scornful emphasis.

“And when I said that their burial places were well known

and remembered : that Christ remembered, and their comrades ; then she said, ' Yes, but other people ; the world ; they know nothing.' And I answered again that other people and the world matter only to people who think this world and other people the great thing.

"She would not face that. All she would say was, 'Your comrades are dead ; dead and buried, and nobody gets any good of them and they get good of nobody.' And I smiled quietly, for I thought how they would laugh in their graves at the notion that anyone living on earth had any good that could move them to desire. And as I smiled I looked out through the window, and over the sea, and across the years, and across the lands, and across the memories in my mind, and I saw their graves again, from the last one to the first one, from the grave in the swamp to the grave in the open sunlight. And most of all my mind went back to the very first comrade I ever had. He was as young as I, midway in the teens, and we were both new to the game, and he was killed with the first shot in the first brush of the affair, we two alone, holding a point on the flank. And when I'd buried him and gone on, I rode back to look at his grave again, haunted by the thought of it, there on the point of the high, wide flat, in the loose soil and the sparse grass, sunlit and wind-swept and lonely ; the loneliest thing under the sun, as I thought it at that moment.

"But Time has gone on since then ; years have stored themselves in my memory, and as I looked out, through that window and over the sea, back at that grave again, I thought of it all, and I said to myself, What has he lost that I have gained : what does he lack that I have, save the bare life ? If he stepped out of his grave and I met him now, I should know him, but he would not know me, I am so changed. Not changed in face alone, but changed in very me. The youth is gone out of me ; the wonder and the splendour and the mystery of the world is gone out of my heart. Men I know. The world I know. The earth I know. Life I know, and the only thing left for me to know is the other side of Death. The glamour of what lay beyond the horizon that hid it from my body's eyes is gone, and

all that remains is the glamour of what lies beyond the horizon of this life, hidden from my spirit's eyes. And that one knowledge which I still lacked he had. All the knowledge of all the rest was mere trumpery compared with that he had.

"And so he, lying there in that grave, killed ere ever he fired a shot; killed while the world and Life and men were still new between his lips; had yet the best of me, for he knew the greatest thing, not the mere Here that we all know, but the Hereafter. And if he had missed the little triumphs and the petty successes of continued Life, he had missed all its bitter-nesses too, as he lay in that quiet grave, and looked up through the sod to the sun and the sky above him, and heard the breeze wandering through the grass, him dozing the hot noon through, watching the splendour of the sunset as he had watched the glory of the dawn. And then the night; dark and cool and quiet the night would drop, and the peace in his dust would stir with fresh rest at that.

"But when I tried to tell her some part of that, she looked and listened and sat uneasily, and all she said was: 'What of that? He is dead: they are dead. They are of no more importance in the world than dust. And they have none of the pleasures that we can have.'

"It was no good trying to explain. Moreover, she saw it all as loss, and none as gain, when I told her of the advantage we had in our deaths over those who stay at home.

"For, padre, there's a gain. Your gentleman-at-home, with his delicate eating and flunkeyed living, dies of a rheum or a chill or an asthma; dies with a whole skin, his death, like a young cuckoo in a nest, growing and waxing inside him to oust his soul from its lodging. We that take the width of the world for it die no such cuckoo'd deaths as that. Your gentleman-at-home—his friends hear that he is sick; hear that he doesn't seem to get better, and then, at length, when everyone has gone his own way again, hear that he died yesterday, and the funeral is for the day after to-morrow. And so they know he lived, because he has died, and a stone is to be put over his grave to tell how long he lived by the clock, and that's the end of him, and he's

remembered because he's dead—not because he lived—and that's the man.

“We, at least, have more than that. If we are killed in action we are not merely ending of sheer stagnancy; life so low and clogged in our veins that we go out like a fume. We, at least, die at the noblest pitch of life, the pitch of facing Death; fronting Eternity; looking open-eyed into the Eyes of God; life not the noblest thing life holds, and death a lesser ill than certain pregnant ills life knows of. We do not fend ourselves round from death, shooting bolt and bar and setting watchmen against him, as if he were the one great robber in the world. We go out and give him Good-day in the open, he to win if he can, or fail if he must. Death is the task-master of the others; we are his equals, for we go out to him and meet him as man to man.

“Padre, you've heard tell of how I've sometimes gone out alone, or with a man or two, volunteering where other men wait for the order. That's to pass the time o' day with Death again; to let him see I keep my ancient respect for my worship, bidding him note that, though I am here on earth by virtue of a body that he shall some day have, yet I am greater than that body, and greater, therefore, than he, because I myself he cannot destroy, but only my lodging here.

“And you know that I claim the right to lead all the charges of the column, if possible, and that the front attack at dawn shall belong to my squadron. But if ever you're with a night attack you'll know why. Then you get in to arm's length: then you get face to face with the enemy, hand to hand, and then—then you feel and see and hear something that you will feel and see and hear nowhere else; at no other moment; never elsewhere in this life. And once you have felt and seen and heard, you will never be free of it again; never be the same good, easy man that cleaned his rifle, and patted his horse, and looked for somebody to shoot, and thought this world was a decent sort of place for a decent fellow.

“What it is—what is it? It comes when you open the hand-play, life to life, and the rifles are flashing, and the steel is

stabbing, and the shouts are roaring—all in a minute you see that the men are not the men you knew as comrades heretofore. The thing that is in them is older than they, greater than they, deathless where they are frailest flesh, timeless where their life is brief as a breath of summer wind. It is not bravery that is possessing them to madness : it is not courage ; it is a something as though an entity which has lain, stirless and slumberless, all unguessed of, in their breasts hitherto, now suddenly roused at the near presence of its prowling challenger, snarling-visaged Death ; roused to hot raging fury and crested itself forth to browbeat Death back to his kennel. It is lord there : it has lain in a common lodging, the body, but it has never come down to the body's level : it is lord there in the teeth of Death, and if it is so far at the mercy of Death that Death can destroy its lodging, it yet will not abate one jot, but will die as a king dies under the bomb of the assassin—gone, but lord to the last, and lord beyond death because a lord till death.

“And, padre, that thing is the thing that is us ; really us ; the rest is mere lodging and attendance to that, and it never comes out, to be felt and seen and heard, till such moments as that. No man who has ever seen the faces then, and felt the thrill and heard the shouts—the awful shouts—in a voice that is never heard elsewhere than then—will ever forget, ever be the same man again. He has been in the presence of God, for that something is the spark of God which is us, the greatest thing in the world, because the world was made for it to fulfil itself in. And because it is the one great thing on earth, so one leads the assaults that one may watch it and note it, and learn from it ; for in itself it is ourselves, as we were before birth, as we shall be after death, and so one pushes forward to be in its presence, and claim knowledge of it, and power over it. Padre, the next time I lead a night attack, you must come with me and take notes, and tell me what you think of it.”

“I will,” I said, having no more consciousness of power to deny him than any finger of his hand.

He sat quiet again for a little while, and then his voice came as before. “Aye, I told her all that, that day before the war,

and she looked and listened and sat uneasily, and all she said was, 'What of all that? Your comrades are dead; dead and done with, and everybody done with them. Dead men are of no use: only living men are of any use.'

"Well, and that's all done long ago. And this day is done too, and I'm not dead: I'm still alive and it's Erlas that's dead, and I'm to make his bed for him, and cover him close, and then ride on, with the world still in front of me, and my wife in it—but here comes the man with the pick and shovel. I'll get to work."

So we buried the body of Erlas, I repeating the service over him without book, and the third man finding five stones, to set in a cross on the grave after we filled it in. And as we rode back to camp the moon did not dim its silver, nor the wind stir across the feldt, to use the Captain's phrasing. All was cool and dark and quiet.

What they two thought of as they rode I know not, but I was thinking of the other woman, with her resolute materialism, still eating the heart of her heart out for this man, who was all a dreamer of fine dreams; nay of terrible dreams, dreams that dragged him to lead the most desperate charges, even now when he was married to the sweetest wife in the world, as he had called her.

The thing is still a strange thing to me to ponder, but that night I was wondering what would come of the two women if one of those charges should bring him knowledge—that is to say, death.

CHAPTER XXXV

OF LADY H——'S AT HOME, AND OF THE OTHER WOMAN ; AND
SOME LIGHT ON PROMOTIONS

THERE was no more serious fighting for the convoy on that trip, either before we reached Rostron's Column or on the way back to Mooiburg. It should be said, by the way, that the yeomanry came back very different troops from what they were at starting. The three days' handling by Old Fireproof's men, and four by non-coms of the M.I. ; steady daily work under the fire of snipers, had done so much that it was already possible to distinguish between the men who would come to be of some value in time, and those who could be returned home at once as beyond effort. And the Captain of them got himself transferred to the Staff, thus giving the squadron a chance under new leadership.

Then for three months I saw no more of Rostron's Column, for it was operating at the other end of the Free State, and at the end of that time I fell sick of that puller down of prouder men than I—enteric.

All my life I had been a healthy man, seldom having suffered even slight sickness, therefore when the enteric seized me it ran riot. It was by the veriest lightest of airs that I drifted away from death, and even then, just when I thought I was at last set for recovery, I had a relapse, which all but ended me.

Convalescence after a relapse of enteric is slow work, and in the end I was sent home, and there given six weeks' leave, to complete my recovery before returning to the field.

It was about midway in my furlough that my aunt and I went

up to town, for though my aunt professed to hate London at all times, yet certain friends and habituated relatives were there who, in the correspondence which they had never quite dropped, had lately been very full of the doings and promotion—and especially the non-promotion—of this or that member of their “mankind” at the front. And by the light in her eye and the tone of her voice I guessed well what was in my aunt’s mind when she announced at breakfast that we were going to town to stop a few days with Cousin Louisa. She, too, had now someone from the war to brag of.

Cousin Louisa lived in one of those streets which were the newest quarter for the best people what time George IV. was King, and her grandfather had sold his West Indian estates at so good a figure and laid down the port which cut off her father at forty. But she had a cousin, Georgina, who lived in a street which was the latest quarter when the Prince Consort was active, and while it was Cousin Louisa who was the great authority on the sayings and doings of the Royal Family; the married woes of the “little Princesses” and the peccadilloes of the “young Princes”—meaning the sons and daughters of the Queen and Prince Consort—it was her cousin Georgina who was the crushing authority upon the sayings and doings of the smartest set in society.

For not alone had Georgina her own eyes and ears to teach her, and especially Lady H——’s At Homes to test her information at; but there was her “Cousin George,” an elderly General of other days, to bring back everything from his two clubs, which shall be nameless, and above all there was Clara, her maid, whose eldest sister was maid to my lady D—— and whose younger sister was chambermaid in the establishment of Mrs. M——.

Now, no sooner were we arrived at Cousin Louisa’s than she must take us, the very next day, to call on Cousin Georgina, who no sooner saw us than we must come the very next day to Lady H——’s At Home. “You see, John, how silly these women are,” said my aunt to me after that: “Just because you’ve come back from the war they’ll even tolerate me for the chance of trotting you out before other women as silly as themselves.

What some women will do!" Then she added, "I wonder where Lady H—— will trot you to?"

I, however, did not venture upon any guess as to that.

Cousin Georgina, by way of being frightfully in the swim, drove us in a motor-car which, to judge by the vileness of its smell, must have been a very prince amongst motors. Yet policemen, regulating the traffic, stopped it even as if it had been a mere four-wheeler, and in one of those checks a newsboy flashed up and flaunted a placard before me—"Extry Speshul!" he shouted. "Colonel Rostron killed! Heroic charge by Captain ——" and here he named Old Fireproof.

I do not remember in what street Lady H—— lived, for all the way there I was thinking only of what I read in the short paragraph in the stop-press space of the paper. The story was of the simplest: the Boers had concentrated on Rostron's weakened column in a night attack. Fifteen minutes of furious fusillading on their part had been ended by a desperate, costly charge of C and D Squadrons of Rostron's Horse, Old Fireproof leading. Yet the fifteen minutes had been so far effective that the list of the killed was headed by the name of Colonel Rostron, followed by that of the Major commanding the regiment; while the list of the dangerously wounded was headed by the name of my friend the Brigade-Major. "So that leaves Old Fireproof in command of the column," I said. And if the reader say that such words were callous in me, I can only say that I did not mourn the less for the gallant old Colonel because I was glad that my other friend had come by the promotion which had long been due.

For once Lady H——'s At Home was by no means crowded—it was Cousin Georgina who told us how unusual such a thing was, explaining the remarkable fact by mentioning that there were several long-planned functions in society that very day, satisfying Cousin Louisa at once and leaving my aunt with no ground to go upon, as yet, in sarcastic remark.

Lady H——, however, struck me as somewhat flat, compared with Cousin Georgina's allusions to her. Not to be finicking of explanation, she seemed as if she would be found to be much of

a muchness with any ordinary half-dozen ladies from the like patterned houses of the same street, save that, by good fortune, they might have better manners.

Cousin Georgina introduced Cousin Louisa and my aunt in a high rattle of a phrase that made my aunt look at her sharply. With me she added a gloss to the phrase, to intimate that I was one of the heroes returned from the war, and an air to her manner to intimate that, while ordinary people would be greatly impressed by such a thing, yet to herself and Lady H—— such a thing was quite absurdly common. Whereat Cousin Louisa could not be left out, but first fell to a simper and then struck in, “Yes, and he has just seen such dreadful news in the paper. Poor dear Colonel Rostron, a very great friend of his out on the veld” (she evidently “spelled it with a v,” for she so pronounced it), “has just been killed, and Major What’s-this, another great friend, and another Major, killed and wounded. It quite upset him.”

But Cousin Georgina was not to be put down. “Yes, but then, you know, you spank the baby to make it cry, and then give it a sweetie to make it laugh again” (Lady H—— bridled and stared at that, as if to wonder what the dickens Cousin Georgina knew of babies, any more than she herself), “and if the Colonel and these other people have been killed, yet the Captain who did the heroics, and made the Boers run away and lay, is also a very great friend of his, and is pretty certain to be promoted into the dead men’s shoes, and be made a Major and get the regiment to command.”

“Oh!” returned Lady H—— with sudden energy, “but wouldn’t that be just the thing for Percy? He’s a sort of a Major already, and he said he wanted to get a regiment to command.”

In fact, Lady H—— was so convinced that this was just the thing that she turned her back on us all and called across the room to an ancient General (sitting there with a couple of vivacious young ladies of forty or thereabout, none other than “Cousin George”), “General, here’s something that sounds as if it would just suit Percy. Can’t you go quick and see about

it, before somebody else goes and gets it for somebody else?"

"What is it?" cried Cousin George heartily, rising and coming our way. "Percy's already on the spot; he ought to cable you if it's something he wants."

"Oh, but perhaps he hasn't heard yet," returned Lady H——, not to be shaken at the first reply. "Tell the General all about it," she went on, turning, not to me, but to Cousin Georgina.

"Oh, there's a Major man been killed and a Captain man who thinks he'll get promotion and the regiment," returned Cousin Georgina, between an air the airiest and a boredom of the boredest. "It's this affair of Colonel Somebody who's just been killed in this afternoon's papers. Show him," she ended, turning to me. Whereat I found that I had the paper in my hand, and so handed it to the General, saying only, "Colonel Rostron's affair—there," and I pointed to the paragraph.

The General read it through before he spoke. But then he spoke with feeling. "Rostron killed! That's a sad thing. That's a loss to us, too, for we'd all begun to think he was going to make a General of the best sort. But Percy can't expect to succeed a Colonel: he's only just Major since—how long?—a month, isn't it? And isn't he only local rank or something like that?"

"No, General," I put in. "The ladies are thinking of his succeeding the Major who was in command of Rostron's Horse—you see there that he was killed. But I should think that must go to the Captain who led the bayonet charge—you see it there—he is Senior Captain and a very brilliant officer, long marked for promotion."

"Yes, and wing-leader already, it seems, for he took the left wing out to smash the Boers," replied the General briskly. "I've seen his name before, too, once or twice if I'm not mistaken. Yes, I should think there's not much chance for any outsider to come in over his head. Percy must wait for some other vacancy, I should think."

"But who is this Captain?" demanded Lady H—— impa-

tiently. "One never even heard of him. There never was anyone of that name. I know most people that are people, too."

"He belongs to a very ancient family," I said quietly. "He is a man of the highest standing at home in Wales."

"Wales!" echoed Lady H——, much as if I had said Kamschatka or the Cannibal Islands. "There's Sir Watkin, I know, but the rest! A Welshman, is he? One of those dreadful people that go about making speeches against the Empire, and that our men should be put in prison, and having to be escorted by the police to escape the mob that's wrecking the hall—is it likely the Government would give him a regiment? A Pro-Boer like that! Say something funny next time, not that stuff," ended Lady H—— caustically.

Only Cousin Georgina dare intrude a voice on the silence which followed. "Oh, but you see, you do meet such funny people in funny countries like South Africa, and it's only that it's his friend."

But Lady H—— simply turned her back upon that speech and looked impatiently at the General. The General, however, smilingly shook his grey head. "This Captain doesn't seem to need any escorts. And he seems to have made more than a speech the night before last: he seems to have made his promotion pretty safe."

"General, don't rot! Say something funny if you must say something!" retorted Lady H——. "Go at once and see somebody and get that regiment for Percy."

The General grinned a little wickedly. "In a matter like this I'm hardly of the right sex. The one to go to should be——" and here he named none other than "the other woman." "He's some connection of hers, isn't he? Cousin of sorts, isn't he? She's just the one for what you want."

"Yes," returned Lady H——, cresting at the first mention of the other woman's name. "He is; and when I asked her, the other day, if she couldn't do something for him, she said she'd done it already: she'd horsewhipped him in the public streets of Bloemfontein to teach him his manners to his betters. She

said that was the beginning of promotion in *our* army ; to know whose boots to black."

"She should have said 'whose wrap and fan to carry,'" returned the General, with a sarcastic grin. "Perhaps he hadn't carried hers."

"I said something like that," returned Lady H—— indignantly, "but she said he was doing that when she horsewhipped him. He evidently knew a woman when he saw one, she said, so she did that to teach him to know a man also, as he seemed to have no mark in himself to gauge by. She's cat enough. She was beyond a joke, General."

"She seemed to think she was making a good one," returned the General, grinning caustically. But any further answer or retort was cut short by the entrance of none other than the other woman. "Talk of angels and you'll hear the rustling of their wings," quoted the General gallantly, whereat Lady H—— gave him one glance of icy disgust to precede the eagerly delighted smile with which she stepped forward to welcome the woman she had just said was "cat enough."

What "the other woman" wore this time I do not remember ; it was too fine for me to face it in detail, and all I saw was that it—or she in it—made every other woman in the room look like a servant out calling on another servant—except my aunt, who never looked like other than herself.

The new-comer, however, seemed to keep herself entirely unaware of all these other people, or her effect on them. Indeed, her whole manner was that of one who has stepped into a shop to give a tradesman an order in passing, and she seemed to approach Lady H—— as the first shop-walker she saw, being only anxious to state her wishes and be gone. If she answered her at all, I do not remember it, the first words I noted being upon the matter in hand. "You were asking me the other day to do something for that Percy ornament of yours. Give me his full name and rank and all that sort of thing : there's something in the paper that'll suit him, and I'm going to —— House, and I can see about it at once if you give me the name all right—his card's the thing if I'm quick enough in getting away."

"Oh, I have his card here!" cried Lady H—— eagerly, turning to a little writing cabinet on a table near and perching herself on the edge of a chair. With a hasty pen she corrected the card; with a snatch and a dab she dried it on the pad; with a jerk and a half-jump she was up again and stretching the card to "the other woman's" fingers, all the while with a smile of triumph on her face. "Oh, thank you," she rattled out, on the high cockatoo note affected by most of these women. "It is so good of you! I'll write at once and tell Percy what you've done for him."

"Yes, do," replied the other woman with a little smile of amusement. "He'll come nearer the mark than you. He'll want to know what that's for. You can tell him that, too, if you like. I want him to get promotion, so that Captain —— will retire in disgust and come home, bringing his ridiculous Boer wife with him. I want to be there when he tries to introduce her into society. Your Percy man comes in just handy: but tell him not to provoke the Captain—he won't horsewhip him; he'll just tear him bone from bone when he's in a rage. I'd give a deal to be there when he sees your tame cat come to command him. But ta-ta; I must be off: it won't do to be late." And still with that air of having stepped into a shop and been instructing the shop-walker, she turned and left Lady H—— standing and smiling her thanks—we were nobody.

It was Cousin Georgina again who first ventured a word upon the silence which followed that exit of the meteor. "Such a wreck, isn't she? She was taking drugs already when she got back from South Africa, they say; and she's gone worse since. It shows so plain, too, in her. As soon as she came in you could see at once she'd had a double dose before starting. She'll not last much longer at that rate."

Lady H—— stared in stiff resentment at Georgina, and it seemed there would be another silence, but for the General. "What's on at —— House this afternoon?" he asked. "I thought they were going out of town."

"Not till the week-end," answered Lady H——, turning her back upon Cousin Georgina. "This is a big thing they stayed

over for. All the biggest people are to be there, and nobody else. But fancy this preposterous Captain being not only a Pro-Boer but having married one of those great fat elephant Boer women for a wife! You see, General, after all your silliness, they simply can't promote the man. I suppose that's how all this information gets out to the Boers; through his wife. You ought to go to the War Office at once and tell them, so they can have her tried."

"And shot?" queried the General, with a twinkle of a glance at me.

"Don't be silly," retorted Lady H——. "That's how all these disasters come—through women like that."

"Women like that?" laughed the General, a little grimly. "I think myself that a deal of our disasters do come through women, but women nearer home than that. I expect the Boer women do send information whenever they get the chance; they'd be rather funny birds if they didn't: but if Saul has slain his thousands there, David has slain more than his tens of thousands here. Well, I must be getting along"—and with a drawled phrase of leave-taking the General was gone.

Lady H—— looked at Cousin Georgina with a hard smile. "So sorry you must be going so soon. Well, by-bye, and don't forget my next day. And Percy will be so much obliged to you for telling me of the vacancy in time."

My aunt contained herself very well until we were seated in the motor again and ready to start. Then, loud enough for the footmen at the door to hear, she addressed Cousin Georgina. "Georgina!" she said. "There *used* to be *some* decent people in London. But, if you must live in town, couldn't you get a set of dolls? I saw some very nice ones in a shop as we came along. With them you could *pretend* they were decent, respectable Christians, you know."

"Don't be silly, Martha," retorted Cousin Georgina. "You've seen some of the highest people in society this afternoon."

"High enough, no doubt. High enough to smell, I should think," retorted my aunt, ending all conversation for the way home

My turn came when my aunt and I were alone for five minutes. "So that's the woman, is it?" she began, without further preliminary.

"It is," I said. "What do you think of her?"

"And they were engaged?" pursued my aunt.

"They were," I said.

"And are you sure, quite sure, that your friend is not mad?" demanded she.

"He is quite the sanest man I ever knew," I answered.

"Then he's the most *sensible* man I ever knew," returned my aunt emphatically. "That's the sort of woman men drop their honour and self-respect for; drop everything but her. And she's doing this thing for that old crow of a woman simply to get the man back, so that she can begin to work on him again. Mark my words, the real test of your man's character will begin when he comes home, and matches the woman he has got with the woman he might have had."

I smiled. "Nay, aunt," I said, "I have no more fear for him under such a test than I have that the sky will fall. He is too sound in sense for such a failure as that."

"Too sound in sense?" retorted my aunt. "What sense has he got to put his life in danger every day and night, in a profession where promotion and rewards can be dealt with as we saw them this afternoon? That woman will win; this tame cat of Lady H——s will get the regiment, and your Captain will have to resign and come home."

"If he will," I answered. "But I have a deadly fear that he won't. I have a fear that he'll either bring himself to court-martial by thrashing this Percy, or that he'll come to disaster and death by making one of his accustomed daring moves, expecting to be backed up as usual, and instead of that there will be this tame cat!"

I said no more: the dread on me was too great.

CHAPTER XXXVI

OF THE "WAGGON PUP" AND "THE BOOKMAN," AND OF WHAT
HAPPENED TO THE COLUMN AFTER THEY CAME TO IT

THAT twenty minutes at Lady H——'s took all the gilt off the rest of my six weeks' furlough, so that I began to look forward to the end of it, when I should be free to return to South Africa and see what had happened to Old Fireproof and the rest, when the "tame cat" came to command the regiment. Even on the voyage itself I was impatient, and not till I woke one morning to find Table Mountain looming statelily above me did I heave a sigh of relief.

The two fashionable hotels were hardly the places for a poor chaplain, and I remembered an hotel in a certain side street, off Addeley Street, which the doctor had once recommended me to use, if I were ever in Cape Town again. Thither, therefore, I bade the cabman drive me from the wharf, and there I stepped down from the "cab," to find on the door-step none other than the very doctor himself.

When he saw me he simply leaned against the doorpost and laughed slowly. "Well, well," he said at last. "Luck hasn't deserted us yet, and ye're just in time for a job ye'll hear of, after ye've had a decent breakfast, and come round with me to a house I'll take ye to. Come now, for once in your life have a drink, if it's only a Kimberley drink—champagne and beer; or a Johannesburg Improvement—champagne and stout. Or take both: they'll soothe ye like mother's milk after all the anxiety ye must have been in about us, since poor old Rostron was killed. Ye'll never guess what happened to us after that."

"I'm afraid I know without guessing," I said. "And it is like an answer to prayer to find you here at once, to set my fears at rest. You are well—tell me, then, is the Captain well also?"

"Ye shall see that for yourself, with your own eyes, when ye go round with me to the house I spoke of," answered the doctor. "He's getting more like a Christian these days. I'm living in hopes of seeing him afraid yet, like any common mortal, an' then the rest of us won't need to feel so small at times. Come, I was trying to get an appetite for breakfast, an' now I don't need one; I'll eat for pure pleasure now."

Certainly there is no one to compare with an Irishman for putting things prettily if he will. Nay, as we went upstairs to the dining-room, he turned and broke out again as we passed in at the room door; all as if he had just realised my presence afresh. "By the little red piper of Drumanna! padre," he began again, "I'm pretty well a teetotaller these days, barring a few drinks between meals and some with 'em, or I'd have sworn I'd got 'em—you know what—for I just remember that you're supposed to be dead these long months past—that's the news we got from a Johnnie that came up convalescent. But if you'll just let it pass without telling me that the report was slightly exaggerated, I'll forgive you causing me to need double drinks this day to congratulate myself that an old friend has come to life again. Faith! padre, to see you quite brings back the good old days before the black night when Rostron was killed, that broke up our happy home by letting in the squirt that came up to command the regiment; none other than that red-tabbed Johnnie that got the cut from the riding-whip in the streets of Bloemfontein."

"Ah," I answered, as we sat down to a table by the window. "I was in London when the news of Rostron's death and the Captain's gallantry came. They brought out a special edition for it that afternoon. But tell me what happened when the red-tabbed man came up."

"Well, when we buried the Colonel and the Major, it was the Captain took command of the column and worked the trek out,

and brought us in to Bloemfontein again; for the yeomanry Captains never thought of trying to stand on their precedence: they hadn't been with that column so long for nothing. But when we got into Bloemfontein, and everybody was expecting Old Fireproof's promotion, what should happen but out came one Johnny to take command of the column, and this red-tab pup to command the regiment. By the piper, padre, there was the fury in the column that night!"

"And after that?" I asked, almost breathless with anxiety.

"Oh, these two had seven days to get into touch with their new commands, and they used the seven mornings in calling for parade-states and field-states and horse-states and memos and indents and pay-sheets and the Lord knows what all, while the seven afternoons and evenings they used in Bloemfontein, as if it was Piccadilly and the Park in one. Then we were joined with Old Biff-em-Stiff's Column, for fear we'd get wiped out under the new management—a pretty good tip as to what Headquarters thought of the two—and after that we started off on our own ownsome; from Mooiburg, if you please——"

But I broke in upon the doctor's account. To me he had missed the chief moment; the moment when "the tame cat" and Old Fireproof had first come face to face as superior and subordinate, commander and commanded, superseder and superseded. "Doctor," I said, "what happened when they two came face to face again, the Captain and Percy?"

"Percy!" echoed the doctor. "And where did you get so familiar with him that you know him by his Christian name? We haven't come to that yet; we've only come to the natural name the men gave him the first trek, the 'Waggon Pup,' because he always kept so close to the waggons when there was any firing on."

"Never mind just now, doctor; I'll explain later. Just tell me what happened when the two first came face to face."

"Nothing at all: just nothing at all in the world," returned the doctor. "Old Fireproof's none of your Greeks to go and sulk in his tent. Up rides the Waggon Pup. 'Is this my regiment?' says he. 'This is Rostron's Horse,' says a man.

'That's it,' says the Waggon Pup: 'I'm commanding it now. Send the Adjutant to me.' But Old Fireproof had given the Adjutant a couple of hours' job in Bloemfontein, so he steps up and says so. 'Oh, well, you'll do,' says the Pup. 'I want to see the papers: the regiment'll be slack, being without a commander since Farrell was killed.'

"'Ah!' says Old Fireproof. 'The papers are all in the Adjutant's chest: he'll be out again in half an hour or so. He's taken the orderly-room clerk with him.'

"'That's a very irregular way of doing things,' said the W.P.

"'Ah!' says Old Fireproof, and left it at that. And that was all there was of it. What did you expect, padre?"

"Not that. But never mind. What happened after that?"

"We went on trek, as I've told you," answered the doctor, "and the top of all treks was that trek. The new commander could squint just once at a koppie and tell you, straight off, the height and the weight and the breadth of it. But whether there was Boers in it was another matter, and if there was he couldn't make up his mind which way to begin on them. He'd think of so many mistakes he must not make, that he hadn't any thought left for the biggest mistake of all—not going for them. With him 'frontal fire is the line of fire perpendicular to the front of the object fired at.' And 'enfilade fire is the line of fire parallel (or nearly so) to the front of the object fired at.' Imagine him in command of fellows whose notion was that a frontal fire was one from or to your front or theirs, and an enfilade fire one that raked you or them from the flank. That had been quite good enough for everybody in Rostron's time, when the column was at the head of the list for Boers accounted for, and now, when they were just a procession of road surveyors, as they said, they had to listen to the lore of books!

"And the Waggon Pup was the dead echo of him in all that—Phew! padre!"

"Well, but the real day was the day we first came to thick Boers. The commander of the column was as resolved as a newspaper to deal with those Boers, and beat them off in a way they'd remember. And the W.P. was ready to stand at his back

till his chest was beaten blue, as the saying is, and just then they lifted up their eyes, and, behold you, yonder went Old D Squadron to get a koppie that would have put us out of action in a couple of shakes if the Boers had got it, and this way went C Squadron and that way a squadron of the yeomanry, to support and play up to D by swooping on a ridge and a donga that put the Boers back a mile. And while the two new Johnnies were hardly believing their eyes, here comes a message from Old Fireproof to say that they could hold that position quite well till the rest of the column swung round and got the Boers on the hip from behind.

“What the two Johnnies did—after gasping at last—was to glue the rest of the squadrons to the waggons like a drill-book, till they’d got the transport safe to some high ground, where there was divil a drop of water. That’s where they were going to camp, and call in the three squadrons, and then they’d ‘operate against the enemy.’

“You can imagine Old Fireproof when he saw the column go, for the Yeomanry had gone, like good stout lads, into as ticklish a position as there is in the book, and the going of the column left them uncovered, just where it was good and thick. And you can imagine the rest of the column, too, at having to go, and what they said to themselves as they saw Old Fireproof work the three squadrons back to the rest.

“There was a tearing row when he got back, for all the Captains gathered to him, and when my bold two new commanders stepped up and began to ask my lad what he meant by what he’d done—without orders—well, you don’t need a photo to let you see the black grin that was on his face as he said he’d meant saving the column from a loss and retreat, which he’d done; and as to his message that he’d sent back, if they’d acted on that message—just come and looked at the situation and then moved like fire—they’d have bagged pretty well half the Boers before they could have got out of the way. By this time they’d have been some couple of hundred prisoners to the good at least.

“And by the time the two had duly choked him off, and

rubbed it in by stating what they intended to do—'twas the column commander did the talking, of course—the rest of the Captains saved Old Fireproof from the fire that was in him by asking where was the water to camp on, and where was the ground to begin 'operating' in, seeing that they'd given the Boers the floor, and the very first move would have to be to capture koppies enough to give them ground to start working from.

"Well, and the end of it all was that the column trekked into the railway again without a prisoner—fancy the old column coming in without a prisoner!—except a poor trooper of its own for court-martial—fancy the old column and a court-martial!—and Old Fireproof had to send in his papers—only Irregulars have no papers to send in, they can only send in a resignation. And he had to apply for a month's leave, pending the acceptance of his resignation, and come down by the first train.

"The regiment wanted him to go to Pretoria and see Headquarters, as Irregulars naturally would, with their simple notion that to expose a wrong is to get it set right at once. But he shook his head. 'D'ye think that appointment was made at Headquarters?' he said. 'That appointment was made at Home, you'll find.'

"So he came down by the first train, and every train since then has brought down more or less of Rostron's Horse, till there's not sixty left of six hundred, for all the rest had finished their time and were only serving on because it was good to be in that column, till The Bookman and the W.P. came to it. And in two days' time the month's leave is up, and the resignation will be a fact."

But I still hearkened after my first point. "And all that time did the two, Old Fireproof and the Waggon Pup, never recognise each other?"

"The W.P. never once had the prick of a thought that he'd ever seen the Captain before: the Captain knew him again at the first flash of the eye. But he never said a word till I tackled him about it. 'D'you remember him?' says I. 'Am I likely to forget him?' says he. 'He touched you with his cane,' says I.

'Yes,' says he, 'and if we're both alive at the end of the war I'll remind him of it, and tell him that if he was worth it I'd break him bone from bone; but being the spawn that he is I'll leave him to fester on in his native mud—will that please you, doctor?' 'No,' says I. 'I want to see you dust the ground with him.'

'Dust the ground with that!' says he. 'Doctor, I hope to be buried in the ground some day, and I'd rather keep it clean than foul it.' 'Ah, well, says I, 'you'll have it your own way, anyway. But if ever you do turn loose on him, for the love of Heaven give me the nod in time, for me to be there to see it. An' he laughed; an' that's the whole of it. As a matter of fact, the W.P. kept out of the way of him as far as he possibly could."

"One other thing, doctor," I put in. "When he said that that appointment was made at Home, who was he thinking of?—the woman of the empty house and the shadows?"

"He was. I put it to him straight, and he answered me straight. 'Yes, it's her doing, I don't doubt,' says he. 'But that's all part of the game. If she will do such things, she must. I can't help that. If a man ever makes love to any woman, he must take whatever comes of it, and take it with a stiff upper lip'—and that's all the word he'd say or let me say, until I said 'Yes but what price us? She's ruined you; but she's ruined us, too, in ruining you.'

"'Ruining me!' says he, with that smile of his. 'Nobody in this world can ruin me except myself.'

"'Hang your philosophy this time!' says I. 'She's ruined the column, and done that much harm to the Empire as well as us, and philosophy's no help to us.'

"'And,' says he, 'I'll confess it wasn't much help to me, either, last night, when it came quite home to the bone of my heart that I was done with the regiment, done with the column, done with the field and the fighting before the fighting is done: done with you all that were like my own blood to me; done with all you that have ridden the rim of Death with me so often that we seemed to have grown into manhood together. A grown man

does not often shed tears, doctor, but when that thought came home to me last night, I went out into the feldt in the dark, alone, and I sat me down and my eyes ran down like rain. Philosophy was little help to me then.' ”

The doctor paused ; and in my heart one phrase was echoing over all. “ Done with the field and the fighting before the fighting is done ! ” I repeated. “ Does that mean, doctor, that he is going home before the war is ended ? ”

“ It means that he thought he'd have to go. But we knew he'd never get away from Cape Town, with the need there is for men. He wasn't here a week before a Colonel he'd been with, earlier in the war, met him and bagged him to bring up a couple of squadrons, and take a wing of the regiment as Major. In five minutes he'd said yes, and all the fellows that have been coming down from Rostron's rolled up a week ago and joined that regiment. Mansel's going up as one Captain ; Kingstone's another—poor McHoy's away with enteric on top of three bullet-holes ; he'll hardly see the field again in this war. They all go up to-morrow in a troop-train, and the Captain—or the Major as he'll be then—overtakes them in the mail. It's all settled : we'll all be back in the field together.—Padre, you'd better get appointed to us if you can, and come along.”

“ Thank you, doctor,” I said, “ and now I'll tell you a little tale, too ”—and forthwith I told the story of what happened in Lady H——'s drawing-room.

The doctor heard me out to the last word, and then he said, low and emphatic, “ Didn't I tell you, padre, that she was a clinker ; game as a bird ! She'll fight to the last : any move there is on the board, she'll try it. She's set her mind to have him at her feet again and, faith, if it was any other man—any ordinary common, sane, Christian man—she'd win. But that's the tragedy of it ; if it was a common, sane, Christian man she was after she wouldn't be after him,—what's the use of being an Irishman if you're still to wade through all the acres of the words ?—for she'd never think of the ordinary man that another woman could go after and get. She's the rare one. But here comes the breakfast, and after we've done we'll go round and

call on Old Fireproof, and see the girl that beat the smartest woman I ever saw, and did it, too, without trying, and without knowing of it: beat her not by dress and not by 'smart' tricks and ways, but just by the sheer grace of sheer womanhood, as God intended it to be. What say you, padre?"

"Amen," I said, and fell to breakfast.

CHAPTER XXXVII

OF THE CAPTAIN'S VISION OF A NEW AND NOBLER WAR, AND OF
HIS PITY FOR "THE OTHER WOMAN"

BREAKFAST having been late with us, and there being one or two little things to do afterwards, it was well on for noon by the time we reached the house the Captain had taken for his wife, high up in Tamboer's Kloof, with Table Mountain in front of it, the city like a map below it, and the bay crowded with shipping to its left. "He always did have an instinct for a good position," jested the doctor, as we stopped at the garden gate to look back before entering.

The house stood in the middle of a well-kept garden, of the bountiful South African kind, and the moment we entered the doctor broke out: "See him! see the terrible, earth-shaking, nation-devouring, blood-boltered warrior, with his coat off and his breeches belted—gardening! How are the mighty come down to pruning-hooks and flower-scissors! It's the old tale, padre. Man, clothed in the grandeur of his might and the beauty of his stars and garters, spurning the earth and scraping the skies as he treads and makes the ocean quake; a sight for the gods to envy—and then along comes a girl and turns their envy to a front seat at the pantomime. 'Oh, a man!' says she, and the next thing you know, there he is, gardening, like that!" And here the doctor pointed to the figure of a man, bending and working at the roots of a creeper that climbed the trellis of the verandah in front of the house.

"I told him, the other day, that I wondered he didn't use his bayonet for digging," went on the doctor; "but he grinned and

said he might have done, if he thought the missus wouldn't want it for a hat-pin, or a nail in the wall to hang pan-lids on. Oh, he's the family man right down to the ground!" ended the doctor with a relish.

But the Captain had seen us coming up the path, and he left his tools and came to meet us with long, easy strides, his hand extending to grasp mine, his smile deepening his welcome. "Aye, aye," he cried cheerily, "good ghost of an old friend of the good old happy days! Come now; you are well come to us this day, for only this morning my wife was mourning that you had died of the enteric, and wishing that you were here so that you could do what we wanted a parson for—has the doctor told you the news yet?"

"Of Rostron's death?" I began.

But the Captain smiled as he broke in on me. "Nay, not of poor Rostron just this one minute. Not of a friend's death, nor of death at all. It's not death but life we're speaking of: not the passing of a gallant gentleman but the coming of what shall be another one, please God! Mr. Allen, in the classic words of the nurse, 'It's a boy!' and now do you understand?"

If, in my bewilderment, I had failed to grasp the situation, the doctor would have left me no chance of remaining dark. He dugged me in the ribs and smacked me on the back. "A boy, padre; what do you think of that now? And he came into the world with a yell of demand to know what we all meant by this, just like his daddy. And then he went straight to nosing for titty; as determined as his daddy when he's ramping in the field—and his mammy wants you to christen him at once. What's your opinion of rats now, me boy?"

The doctor's laugh bred laughter in me, and remembrance—"Of rats?" I repeated. "Why, that they're fine—in a pie—like young rabbit, only nicer: so the Captain himself told us once. And they're just splendid in a stew, he said."

Whereat we all three fell a-smiling and laughing afresh, and went up the path like three boys for light-heartedness, the

doctor singing a rollicking verse of which I still remember the first two lines :—

“I was born in sweet Killarney,
One day when I was young.”

But as we came near the house the Captain put his hand out and checked us. “Steady now! She’s on the stoep, round the other side of the house, and we’ll go quietly, or else we shall drop in for it for ‘waking the baby.’”

“D’ye see how she’s got him tamed and trained, padre?” hinted the doctor in a stage whisper. “She’ll be able to make him sit up in one corner of the cage soon, and jump through paper hoops, and put her head in his mouth in public.”

“Yes,” assented the Captain, joining. “I can sit up and beg for sugar already, and bark when she says, ‘Speak, Towzer!’ I’m getting quite intelligent, she says. But come on now.”

Quietly we went round on the path, and I was glad we made no noise, for thereby we had a sight which comes up often now, as I look back out of these level days. The stoep was broad, and screened by a trellis hung thick with flowering climbers, through which the roses held their own in all their finest tints and fragrances.

The filtered reflex of the golden sunlight without made warm the shady space within, where had been spread the lordly leopard-skin kaross, sewn of matched and chosen skins, which I remembered as having been Old Fireproof’s one extravagance, part of his “bed” in the feldt. On that kaross a pile of silken pillows made a bed for a little babe which lay, with great serious eyes, watching the smiles and listening to the crooning golden voice of its mother, as she knelt on one knee beside him, drinking deep of that happiness which a mother may know, but which it is not for a man to attempt explaining.

Her back was partly to us, and so she did not see us at first, but kept her poise as we kept our pause. Just once I glanced from her to him, and as his glance caught mine—“Dea Matris,” he said, with a light in his face that justified me of my part in marrying him. “Dea Matris,” he repeated.

The doctor turned upon us with his quick smile. "I know Latin, too : I write it, too—in prescriptions."

So we smiled away from the thing that had gone to the consciousness of all three of us ; that here was the living picture of the Goddess of Motherhood. And with the smile we started on again to the steps that would lead up to the stoep, whereat her quick ears caught our approach, and she started up and turned and faced us as we came up the steps. "Ah, no, dearie!" she cried softly. "You shouldn't catch me unaware like that!"

I need not repeat the compliment he paid her in answer, which brought him another pretty rebuke. He might well say things which would keep her standing as she stood there, facing us, the wild rose in her cheek deepening a little at his open admiration. Stately she had always been, and motherhood had but changed her from one pedestal to another. The girl's face, that had seemed haunted by the Future, was become the mother's face, fulfilled of the Present, and facing Life with a sense of Destiny entered upon : of Purpose attained.

I found myself with no difficulty of looking at her ; she was too splendidly natural and sweet of look to put my eyes to shyness, and I see yet, as vividly as I saw then, how simple and how effective was the dress she wore.

Just a wapper it was ; the simplest robe that could be put together ; a wrapper of pale blue zephyr, but bordered from neck to hem by a broad band of white silk like a stole ; the cuffs of the easy sleeves being of the same material. The dusky mass of her hair, now showing more as brown shot with gold, was piled up in some loose way that seemed to frame the upper half of her face. A band of black velvet was fastened round her neck by a pearl brooch ; something of lace was showing at her throat, between the lines of the stole-like silken border as it drew together to be fastened, above her breasts, by a brooch of rare enamel, while the only hint of fashion about her was the elegant shoe, with its paste buckle, which set off her foot ; a foot notably small for so fine a figure, and seeming smaller by reason of its high instep.

And in the three or four rhythmical steps she took towards us to meet her husband, she seemed the lightest and the grace-fullest woman I had ever seen walk. "Most stylish," I have heard men call her. "Most elegant," I have heard women say. "Distinguished-looking," is another phrase I have heard, but the doctor's phrase is the one I think of oftenest. "Sure," he said to me that afternoon, "she walks like the grace of God going through a man's heart."

But she was no sooner come to her husband, and stretching her hands to take possession of his arm, than the child cried out, and straightway in one sweep of blue and white the mother was down on her knee beside him again. Her back was to us as before, but now she lifted the baby, calling to us over her shoulder as she did so, "All you men can just go away, except the doctor. I want him to tell me why baby cried this morning. Perhaps he's ill."

The doctor smiled to the father, who smiled in return before he raised his voice to say, "But, Liefste, here is Mr. Allen, the chaplain—you were saying that you wished he were here——"

"And he is here," she broke in, "and I'm very very glad of it. But he understands: he's seen babies before, and he won't mind waiting a minute. Don't you see we're busy?" And with the word she half turned, and we saw that she was holding the little one in her arms, giving it the breast. "He's just like you," she expostulated. "He won't wait a second when he wants anything. He wants it at once, and he'll have it at once, or tear down the mountain for it. Now you can see for yourself."

"Come, Mr. Allen; we'll go," quoth the husband instanter. "That's orders!" And out into the garden we went.

We kept on, round to the front of the house, where we could see the view as we sat and talked. And there on the front steps we came upon a sight I have often gone back to since, the sight of the woman Gaynor, standing on the lower step, receiving two or three small parcels from none other than the grey old serjeant-major, who had been doing her errands

in the town, and who was now explaining why he had come home short.

Old fighting men are seldom astonished at seeing one who has been reported dead walk up to them and give them greeting. No more was the serjeant-major astonished, but he looked a little shy at the first breath, in spite of the real earnestness of his welcome to me. The woman Gaynor simply made me an old-fashioned curtsy and took her parcels and went in.

The serjeant-major, however, had a message for the Captain from the old hands in camp at Maitland, and within two minutes he was away again, with the answer to the men. "Now, Mr. Allen, we'll sit down," said the Captain: a phrase that used to convey a world of comfort on the feldt, for it meant that for a few minutes there was nothing to do but rest.

"Ah," said I, as we sat down on the stoep, "I've a little tale to tell you—though you know the core of it already"—and forthwith I told him what I had seen and heard that day at Lady H——'s. "So you see," I ended: "you were right when you said it was that woman who caused all the sorrow to you."

"Yes," he answered, with a great sigh. "She must be about as wretched and as miserable as it is possible for a woman to be. It's a tragedy for her, and all because she found herself in Wales and bored to death through having to play honeymoon with the old man she'd just married. For pure desperation she set herself to whistle me to her feet like a little dog, and teach me tricks to amuse herself. And as soon as she found that I'd obey no more, and would listen no more to word or whistle, then she fell into a rage of determination to make me come back, so that she could break me to little pieces and put her foot on me. For it's all just her pride: sheer pride. She was spoilt as a child: she was never crossed in all her life: never disciplined; never wanted a thing but she had it. I was the first thing that was ever taken from her, and so she raged to get me back so she could break me into pieces and stamp on me."

"No," I urged. "I truly believe that she loves you. I believe that you could have done as you would with her, and made her take whatever tone you liked."

"Don't, Mr. Allen; it won't do," returned the Captain resolutely. "I thought the same once. While she was alone in Wales, no one there but me, she could keep a smooth face on things. But the moment she got back into the atmosphere of the other life; or the moment she came against any vision in me; then I saw through it, and saw what it was, sheer boredom and sheer spoiledness, trying a new plaything. I don't doubt she thinks her rage against me is her one great passion: I don't doubt she's capable of looking round for the shadiest ornament of her world and marrying him, just to flaunt her scorn of the ideals I used to insist on when I was dreaming through the days with her. But that will all wear out. She'll go on, with frocks and society fads and engagements, and she'll draw on to her painted and wrinkled and bedizened end, like the rest of her sort—God help them: they are a piteous gang."

I shook my head, but he went on. "What could you expect? They put no ideals into her mind when she was young. They sowed no seed of visions in her soul then. It was her father's money and her mother's frocks and society triumphs that the gutter-minded servants talked of to her, through all the days of her upbringing. What chance had she!"

"Especially when you, the one man who might have saved her, did not think her worth the mastering; as she herself said to me," I answered him.

"Did she say that I threw her over, then?" demanded the Captain.

"She did not. She said it was all her own folly. But she said that the whole trouble was that you did not care enough to master her and make her walk your way," I answered.

"To knock her down and black her eyes, like a navvy, I suppose!" returned the Captain grimly. "Well, Mr. Allen, we'll be done with her. She's done me as much harm as she could, and she's eating her heart out because it's succeeded—I'll give her that credit. As a matter of fact, if I hadn't married, I make no doubt that, if I'd survived this war and gone home and found her still there, it's quite possible I should have gone to her and taken her and married her, and spent the rest of my life in

making her keep between the lines. But I found my wife, and in finding her I found the real world: the world that counts: the world that endures; the world of decent man and wife and children. My eyes are opened at last, and I see how I've wasted the years that lie behind me: 'the years that the locust hath eaten'; but I look forward, too, and I see a vision of how I may use the years that are still to come, please God."

"And the vision?" I asked softly.

"A splendid vision," he answered ringingly. "A vision of all the work that I may do for men: all the wrongs that I may help to right: all the injustices that I may fight to overthrow. When I think of it all, it's then I feel the keenest for all the years that I've wasted till now: years in which I might have done so much."

"And yet through all those years you were fighting for the right, as you thought," I answered. "Cuba and Greece and all the rest—you were helping the right as you saw it."

"Yes," he returned. "And Cuba was not freed till the United States did it, and Greece was only saved by the Powers. And so it is: I see now where the way lies. It lies with Cromwell's answer to Mazarin and the Pope, and Cromwell's answer was only an answer because the nation behind him was roused for truth and right, as it saw truth and right; burning like fire for the vision that it held before its eyes. That is the way: so work and so rouse the whole nation that it will not brook wrong or injustice done, either at home or abroad. God! how splendid it would be to be a soldier then: a captain in an army that such a nation would send out on such an errand: how splendid to die, when one must, on such a field as one could fight if one were fighting in such a war as that! Aye! let us rouse our people to such a pitch again, and it would be something to thank God for to be alive then and turn its eyes on this wrong and that, and sweep the world clean of the greater evils."

"A splendid vision," I said: "splendid enough to be worth while."

"Mr. Allen, that is the vision that is with me now for the future," returned the Captain. "That is the one thing I'm

thinking on. When my little son was born, I went in, and he was lying in my wife's arm, and she, forspent like a wounded man, but sweet and proud—aye, so sweet and so proud. And I kissed her, and I thanked God, and I took down my carbine and bayonet that hung on the wall above the bed, and I laid the steel across his little hands and he was true: the little fingers gripped the steel and held fast while I lifted him half out of his mother's arms. '*Gwell angeu nag ovn*,' I said. 'Better death than fear.' Son! little son! fourteen hundred and fifty years your ancestors are known, from father to father back to that king of the Picts who drove Vortigern to calling in the Saxons to help him. And from son to son, all down the five and forty generations before you, every one of them has closed his grip on the steel the moment it was laid near him in the hour that he was born. But you shall grip more than the steel. You shall be shown the vision that I have seen: you shall follow the true dawn, as I've seen it at last.' And so he shall, God helping us, Mr. Allen."

"Fourteen hundred and fifty years—do you not think the old vision will be too strong in him for the new?" I asked. "Will he not long for the sword too?"

"He will," returned his father. "He will! Don't mistake,—he shall be trained to fight for his country if need be. The old Welsh laws were true there. When the boy grew to be fourteen he was handed over to the chief to be trained in all that made a fit and full tribesman. For seven years he was taught to plough and sow and reap, to shear and to weave, and do all that went to making a living, but over all else he was taught to war, to defend that living, skilled and practised to weapons and marching, and inured to hardships and endurance. And not till he had finished that seven years' training was he passed back into the tribe, to be a fresh strength to it. No wonder that the nation never could be rooted out, in spite of all the armies that came in endless clouds to do it. And that's my ideal still: and my son shall be taught and trained to war, that he may the better follow this greater vision, for he will know that, when it comes to the steel for it, he can take the steel with the best

and worst of its enemies. Nay, it is but common honesty that the man who lives at peace to work because of the strength of his nation, should fit himself to be part of that strength."

"And what does your wife say to it all?" I asked.

"We have talked it all over. She sees it too. If I am killed in the first hour of the first trek when I get back to the field, still I am not ended. My son remains, and his mother will set his face to the light I have seen: he shall follow the vision that I would have followed: he shall do what his father would have done, had he but seen in time."

"And the other woman?" I asked.

"She is done with," answered the Captain. "She has done what she could and still I am happy. For I have the sure foundation of the greater happiness: wife and son, and work to be done, for the thing mine eyes have seen."

"Yet you must watch for the other woman," I replied. "She will harm you yet if she can."

"Will she? Phoh!" laughed the Captain.

Even while he laughed here came his wife. And as we rose to meet her, she stooped a little, to show us the little one asleep in her arms. "Mr. Allen," she said softly, "I want you to christen him—because you married us."

And I, bowing my head and saying how happy I should be to do so, thought no more on danger, for in the presence of these two, and thinking on the vision of what they intended to do, the other woman and her story seemed very far off and faint, like the echo of a tale once heard in passing.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

OF HOW WE MET THE GREY OLD SERJEANT-MAJOR AGAIN, AND OF
THE TALE HE TOLD US

THAT very evening an order came from Headquarters, curtly refusing the Captain's leave, and commanding him to return to the regiment at once. There was just time for him to pack his kit and catch the night train to the north, the serjeant-major and young Palliser going back with him, for those two had not yet joined the new regiment like the rest.

"Captain," I said, as the train started, and he leaned out of the window for a last handshake, "I fear this is more of that woman's work."

"Quite likely," returned he resolutely. "But that can't be helped. One must take things as they come, and just keep on fighting. The man who keeps on fighting isn't beaten even if he's killed, so long as he's killed still fighting."

"But if you're killed, what of the vision then?" I asked.

The train had carried him a yard beyond me already, but his voice came ringing resolutely back. "There's my son and there's the vision—teach him to be a man; all a man—do that, and I'm not beaten if I were double killed." So he went.

"Fat comfort—that!" said the doctor to me. "A drink of good whisky can give it points and a beating any day. But there ye are; what's the good of trying to hurt that sort of a man! The woman's just wasting her time. If she gets him killed she hasn't won, for she hasn't made him wilt. Come on home to the hotel, padre. I'm fed up."

Next morning I remembered that our slow steamer from

home had been passed by one mail, and that another had arrived this very daybreak. I knew therefore that there would be a letter for me from my aunt, and when I got it, true enough, the postscript of her letter confirmed the fear I had expressed to the Captain at parting. I copy the news here.

“P.S. Do you remember I asked you if the Captain was mad? Well, I know now; it's not the man, it's the woman that's mad. I had a letter from Cousin Georgina yesterday, and she says that the woman has set everybody gaping and gabbling—I suppose she means everybody like Lady H——and her At Homes. The woman was one of a smart party at a big country house, and it was a wet afternoon, and they were all boring themselves to death with twaddling of this and that, when up came marriage as a subject—fancy such people on such a subject! And in the middle of it all this woman of yours turns to one of the least contemptible men there and breaks in with—‘You asked me to marry you last night—if you were sober enough to know what you were doing, and haven't cried off this morning, at seeing the paint in the daylight. But you're not rotten enough for me. The only real man I ever saw refused to wipe his feet on me, and I see by the announcement in the *Times* that he's got a son, so my last chance is gone. If you were as rank a stumer as Y——here, I'd let you have me cheap, a bargain in remnants. But you're not, and you can't be, so there's an end of you.’

“Even that ineffable company was a bit stumped at that, especially as the man got red and said nothing. But Y——spoke up, as brazen as brass itself. ‘Done with you!’ he says to her. ‘Bargain or no bargain, I'll take you. I've always had a fancy for that place of yours in Wales. One could be a sort of King of the Cannibal Islands down there.’

“‘Could you?’ retorts the woman. ‘You'd soon find out that it takes a man to be king there. So you be thankful that you won't get the place. I've saved your skin already by writing to my lawyers to settle the place on the son announced in the *Times*. He ought to be my son: I dreamed of having him long enough, and I won't be baulked of settling the place on him—

besides, it'll worry his father. So you see, if you're going to take me you'll have to be satisfied with the town house and my beautiful self.'

"'Done with you again!' says Y——, brazen as ever. And 'Done,' answered the woman. 'But remember you'll have to help me to compensate myself for taking you, by helping me to get even with him—the man—in every way I can, just so that he won't forget me. I had already made him resign, because I hoped he'd come home, but now I hear he's only turned round and joined another regiment, so I'll have to try and get his resignation refused, so he'll have to go back to the old regiment I made impossible for him. You'll have to help me there.'

"'I'll help you,' says Y——. And there you are: with the engagement actually announced in the papers and the wedding day fixed.

"So that's the sort your woman is, and it's more charitable to say she's mad than bad—that's what I'm doing; though everybody else says it's the drugs she takes that have done it.

"Your affectionate

"AUNT MARTHA."

I showed the account to the doctor. "Well," he said, "drugs may have something to do with it. She had it in her without that, though. She had it in her from the start, for she's afraid of nothing, and cares not a curse what the world thinks of her. But still she won't win: he'll not wilt: that's just why she keeps on trying to hurt him. She knows she can't beat him, but she feels it as a sort of link with him still, so long as she's keeping even that sort of touch with him, and making him remember her. But the drugs will soon finish her if she is really taking them.

"I fear she is," I answered; and might have continued the topic but that here came a messenger, bringing me an order to proceed to Bloemfontein at once, and straightway I had to fall to preparation, for I had to catch a troop-train which would leave in an hour's time.

* * * * *

Troop-trains, like troop-ships, are usually slow, and it took us

four days to reach Bloemfontein. Even there I found that my wanderings were not ended yet, for, after being kept hanging about for a week, I was ordered to Heilbron, and told that I could go by the hospital train, which was coming up from Cape Town. However, if I had been gloomy at all at being ordered to Heilbron, I had all gloom dispelled the moment I stepped aboard the train, for the first man I met was the doctor. This was his new appointment, as doctor to the hospital train.

"I wasn't sorry to get away from Cape Town," he said, after the first greeting. "There was Mansel and Kingstone and all the two squadrons, raging and cursing at having to go to the new regiment while Old Fireproof was sent back to the old one. And his wife had taken the baby and the woman and the nurse and gone for a voyage round to Durban and back, to divert her mind at his having to go—that was the order he gave her before he went, as you'll remember. So here I am."

"Happily for me," I said.

At Smalldeed, however, we had to wait for a day, so that we had almost settled down to being lost on the railway before we came at last to Wolverhoek and turned for Heilbron. Even at Heilbron the train stopped short some way out of the station, but in our relief at seeing the place at all the doctor and I got out, to walk to the little corrugated iron station shanty, to make inquiries and to send wires.

I remember yet how brassily the sun beat down, how powderily the dust got up between our feet, how baked the whole place seemed as we went. And on the short platform of the empty station, as we neared it, was only one figure to be seen: a forlorn-looking figure of a man in khaki, sitting on the ground with his back against the station building, his knees drawn up, his elbows on his knees, and his face bent forward between his hands as if he stared listlessly at the dust between his feet. We were come within a few strides of him before the doctor stopped dead short. "By the Powers! it's the serjeant-major!"

At the exclamation the man looked up at us. But he did not rise, he clapped his right hand down in the dust beside him—"Sit down!" he said. "Sit here and listen while I talk!" And

as if we had been automatons at his will, we obeyed, saying never a word. It was as if our whole world had suddenly stood still at the sight of him, with the grey stubble of five days unshaven on his face, and the bloodshot look in his eye.

"Rain——" said the serjeant-major. "Some of the fellows laid it on the rain, and some on the Waggon Pup; and the Waggon Pup laid it on the Captain himself till I took him full and fair in the pimp's mouth of him and knocked him spinning for it. He talked of court-martial till he found I hadn't re-enlisted yet—I was to ha' been a Lieutenant; and then he shut up. But the Kaffir—I took the Kaffir down to the edge of the river again, and there I shot him, and heaved his body into the flood, for if he'd lived he'd have been servant to other men, and they'd have ordered him about, and shambucked him like any other Kaffir, and I wouldn't have a thing that cost so much used that way. I had thought of shooting the Waggon Pup too, but a thousand of him wouldn't have been anything but piffle against that, so I didn't."

I thought that our old friend was ill, and that this was the fever in him talking, but I saw that the doctor's face was greying and his eyes were glitteringly intent on the serjeant-major's face, waiting for him to go on with the tale. He was not looking for fever—or he had seen there was none there.

The serjeant-major began again.

"It was a flood: hell's own flood, the very feldt itself was ankle-deep on the flat, the rain came down in such sheets.

"We'd come to a drift, and we couldn't cross, and there seemed no chance we'd ever get across, for the rain was still a-falling and a-falling, heavens hard. But we heard of a pont the Boers had rigged, further down at a bend of the river, where it cut through the high feldt, in great hooks that carved the country into regular hills and valleys as you looked up from the river's bank. And our orders were sharp to get down here to Heilbron and join the driving line—we couldn't wait: we had to seize that pont if we could, though the bends of the river

were full of Boers, and the high feldt thick with them round and about the pont.

"We'd marched all night to try and surprise the Boer post, that was in a farm a couple of miles in front of the pont, but we'd missed the post—they'd heard us coming miles away, for we were the rottenest mob that ever drew good men's rations. You that remember the old regiment wouldn't have known that lot, as the dawn uncovered it that morning. You'd have known Glentie and his Colt guns, and Wilshire and his pom-pom, and one or two officers in the other wing, but not the rest.

"The men were a visitation of God, the Captain said, to punish us for the pride of the old days, except one squadron of Burghers—they were good men. But the new officers—pups without a hair on their faces, come from staff desks all up and down the railways—they were the sort you'd expect the Waggon Pup to fill up his vacancies with. And that's the crowd the daylight found, there in the great hook of the river that was spouting high, in flood enough to put out the fires of all hell.

"It was two miles from the farm to the pont, and we started at dawn to seize and hold it till the rest of the column and the waggons could come up. The Waggon Pup had been made Lieutenant-Colonel, local rank, and the Captain was Major and second in command, so he could ride where he liked. You know where he'd like, the side where things would happen, and that was the left flank, that kept along the edge of the break, overlooking the river that was ramping down there in its valley, far below. And it was on the left we got the fire first.

"The river there ran along in great hooks, that flanked and outflanked each other, round and between high points and great ridges, till you couldn't tell where you'd got the Boers and where they'd got you, but as soon as it got light we saw the other bank was thick with Boers, and cattle, and sheep, and Cape carts, and waggons, and knee-haltered horses,—we'd fairly come upon them, and they jumped out of their blankets and legged it for cover, and threw the bullets into us good and plenty.

"But just there the river went away for a mile and more in a great hook to the left, and then swung back across our front, two straight miles of it, and the pont in the middle of the straight, so that the regiment would come breast on to the flood there, and be raked from the high point opposite where we were now—the bluff end of a great ridge, with the river under it—if we didn't hang on there and keep that point busy with a decent fire of our own. 'That's what we'll do,' said Old Fireproof, and he strung the squadron out, a troop back yonder to rake it on the east side, a troop breast on to slate it in front, a troop on yonder to rake it from the west, and the fourth troop connecting forward. Then he spurred away to see about the pont, me with him.

"We knew there'd be no Boers at the pont, for the three of us, him and me and young Palliser, had been down and had a look at it before day, and there was no place to hold it except the farm and the great ridges on our side. All the Captain was spurring for now was to see that our right was made good by planting a troop on a high koppie that stood over the next hook of the river. But we hadn't gone four hundred yards before we saw, over our left shoulder, a swarm of Boers working along another point there, a point that would give them the high ground against the squadron we'd just left, so we had to stop and take the fourth troop a shelf higher on our slope, and slate that swarm back, a thing that took us quite a time to do. And it was then the mischief was done.

"For when the troop had got the distance and the timing of the volleys that kept that point clear, we spurred on to cross our front, in line with the straight of the river. And as we crossed a high swell in going we had to draw rein for a minute and look, for yonder on the other side was a big laager stringing out, waggons and Cape carts and what not, trekking and hustling to get out of the way, while the whole high feldt was black with Boers, riding our way to take us on.

"We knew them at once; it was that big commando that runs in that country, anything up to two thousand strong. The Captain smiled. 'We've been cursing the rain long enough,'

said he ; ' but now, if this river wasn't ramping high between us and that little lot—what do you think, serjeant-major ?'

" ' I think we'd last about as long as an icicle in the Place Below,' said I. ' And watch them falling into troops and squadrons: they're going to try the trick they used at Tafel Kop.'

" ' Aye, they mean business,' says Old Fireproof. ' We'll have to ride and destroy the pont, and then get back to the column. Our only way to Heilbron now is round by Villiers-dorp.'

" Away we went, and as we rode we could see all the country well. Our bank was two miles of a smooth open slope, with the river along the foot of it, but the other bank was a flat, and in that flat we saw men riding away from the pont, as fast as they could go to the high ridge beyond. ' Hello !' says I. ' Then there were Boers by the pont after all. See them go !'

" Old Fireproof didn't say a word, but just pressed on faster, and in another minute we came to where we could see the pont below us, and, by gad ! there was a gang of our fellows just crossing on the pont, and the lot that were tripping across the flat, straight for the high ground a mile beyond, were our fellows too, half the Burgher squadron—they were Boers, as I'd said, but they were our Boers, not theirs, riding straight into it unawares.

" Still the Captain never said a word, but just nodded, and in another stretch we plumped on all the rest of the regiment, in a mob, down in the slack of the slope, where the road dipped down to the pont. Glentie and Wilshire and the old officers were standing together, quiet, and the Waggon Pup and his gang together, fussing and cussing, and all complaining to each other at once.

" ' The high feldt on the other side is black with Boers,' says Old Fireproof to the Pup. ' We've jumped the whole host that runs in this broken country and slips from one side the river to the other, to dodge the big columns and slate the smaller ones. How many men are across ?'

" ' I only ordered a troop of the Burghers to go across and

fetch those cattle!" cried the Waggon Pup, nearly squealing. 'But some fellow on the other side fired a shot or two from one of those Cape carts, and that troop started at once for that high ground, instead of fetching the cattle. And the next bally troop I sent went too. So I wouldn't let any more Burghers go, I sent a sergeant and half a troop of another squadron. I believe it's all a trick of our bally Boers to desert.'

"And what officers are with the two troops?" says Old Fireproof, darkening.

"Faddie!" says the Pup. 'There he is, looking after the pont on the other bank.'

"And what's he doing hanging back at the pont while the two troops are up to the neck in the firing? Hear them! they are hard and fast!"—and then he broke off and changed his word, for the sergeant and his half troop had started the cattle this way at the run, and instead of trying to swim them across they were chasing them right down on the pont. And that pont was no better than packing-cases knocked together, the flimsiest thing that ever was a pont: just brown paper if those fat cattle struck it at the run.

"And they did. Old Fireproof saw it coming first, and he yelled, a mile-wide din, 'Stop them! They'll smash the pont! Turn them, Faddie! Swim them!' But it was no use. Faddie ran out of the way of the cattle instead of stopping them, and the forty fat oxen came down on that pont, crash! and smash! and there it was; hoofs and horns and tails and legs and boards and fountains of grey water. That was the end of the pont: the flood rushed over it, and trampled it out of sight, and the half a squadron of Burghers were cut off in the face of two thousand of their countrymen.

"The sergeant and his men drew rein on the bank, and Faddie shouted, 'Oh, I say! the bally pont's sunk!' but the fire on the high ground, where our Burghers had gone, roared into the row of a battle. 'What shall I do?' shouts Faddie.

"Get to your duty!—you whelp you!" yells Old Fireproof. 'Ride now! Get to your men on the ridge and tell them to hold on till I come'

"Then he turned to the mob, taking no notice of the Waggon Pup, for the Pup hadn't a word to say, but sat staring like a stuck pig at where the pont had sunk. 'Wilshire! get your pom-pom on that high kop yonder!' and he pointed to a great kop to the right front of where our Burghers were fast, but on our side the river. 'Go hell-for-leather and ease the pressure on our fellows yonder. Take the other half squadron of the Burghers with you for escort! Go!'

"Away went the pom-pom and the Burghers, and then—'Glentie!' shouts the Captain. 'Take your guns to this rise on the left here,' pointing to the rise we'd seen the laager from in coming, the rise that jutted out into the big hook there. 'I'm going across, and I'll have to withdraw the fellows by the left, and round that big bend there, and I'm depending on you to clear the ground for us. You can reach all round you there; a fine wide sweep of the other bank. And remember I may have to keep on retiring till I get clear out of this broken country into the open again; the whole dozen miles back to the drift, and you'll have to keep along from point to point, helping me with the guns from this bank. I'll depend on you.' Away went Glentie at that.

"The next order was to me. 'You'll stay on this side, serjeant-major!—you and Corporal Palliser. Do what you can: you know the things that'll help.' Then he started for the river.

"Then's the time the Waggon Pup spoke at last. 'Major! you can't go! The flood's too fierce—and see how thick the Boers are coming yonder!'

"'And see how few our men are yonder—and the flood cuts them off,' says Old Fireproof, so quiet that the Waggon Pup didn't understand, but spoke again. 'It's their own fault,' says he. 'I didn't send them up there or to shoot at all. I distinctly sent them for the cattle only, and the swines went straight up there and began shooting. They'll hear from me when they get back!'

"'When they get back—if only they get back, I don't think they'll mind what they hear,' says Old Fireproof, still quiet.

‘They went up yonder because they must. They know the game, and they saw that if that high ground wasn’t held, the cattle couldn’t be got across. But we must pull them out. You know what the Boers will do to them if they capture them, and Headquarters won’t be pleased if that happens.’

“ ‘Well, serve the beggars right for fighting against their own country,’ says the Pup.

“Old Fireproof’s mouth shut close at that, and his face flashed white before he spoke, quieter than ever: ‘That doesn’t help us. They’re our men: we’re responsible. It’s at our order they went across, and we can’t fail them. So if you’ll watch how things go, and move back from point to point, helping me all you can from this side, I’ll get across if I can and withdraw them.’ And he lifted his rein to go down to the river.

“But the Waggon Pup funk’d his going. We’d got a new column commander, and that commander had already told the Waggon Pup what was what, and that he’d better listen to Old Fireproof, and play up to him. And if Old Fireproof were done in now, through him—! He thought of that and he just spurred after Old Fireproof, and he shouted, ‘You can’t go! You’ll be drowned, or be killed with them. Let them take what comes. I refuse to let you go. I sent them across—not you. They disobeyed me, and I leave them to their fate.’

“ ‘And this sergeant and his party—and Lieutenant Faddie?’ says Old Fireproof. ‘They are not Burghers.’

“ ‘That can’t be helped,—we can do nothing,’ says the Pup.

“ ‘We can,’ says Old Fireproof, his voice coming high. ‘We can always die. Besides, I sent a message to the men: I told them to hold on till I came. I’ve never failed men yet.’

“ ‘Time you did! Anyhow, you’ll have to fail these,’ snorts the Waggon Pup. ‘I order you to stay this side, and be damned to your fads.’

“Old Fireproof turned his face to him at that, and the blaze was in his eyes and the whisper in his voice, for he couldn’t shout, he was too hoarse with fury. ‘And I will not fail—either this time or any time,’ he whispered. ‘I refuse to obey your

order. I never turned and left a man of mine yet in all my life, and if I turn and leave these now, then may the haunting Eyes of Christ turn and leave me—for ever!’ And round he put his horse again, and down to the river he rode.

“In all that two mile straight there was just one possible landing-place on the other side of the river, and that was where the bank had been cut to let the pont come in. Four yards wide it was, and if he missed that then there was no saving him. But he looked at the spot, and he looked at the water, and he rode up along the bank, gauging the speed of the flood till he thought he’d allowed enough, and then he put his horse to the foam.

“The horse checked and weaved and snorted, but the rein held him fast, knees and spurs pressed him, and in he had to go. He was a good swimmer, and he struck out like a steamer—but you’ve seen Old Fireproof swim a flood before now, and he did it this time, too, landing in the cut on the other side as clean as ever the pont did.

“‘Mount and come along!’ he shouted to the sergeant and his men, that had been watching him come.

“And they all mounted and followed him, across the flat and up the slope and into the firing line above.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

"THE RIGHT END: THE SPLENDID END"

THE serjeant-major had paused to drink from his water-bottle, but the doctor stopped him and gave him his own. "Medical comforts, serjeant-major," he said.

The serjeant-major nodded and took a long drink. "Thank you," he said, as he handed it back. "And the Captain, as I said, got up to the firing line all right, and I rode away with young Palliser, to where Glentie had pitched his guns, for we could see everything from there.

"And now I had time to look I could see what wicked ground it was Old Fireproof had to fight over. The line our Burghers were holding, that looked so high from the pont, was only the breaking off place of a long slow slope from the main high feldt three miles away, and the Boers were finding cover enough as they worked their way along. And that was the way of the whole country on that side; it all sloped down towards the river, and so Old Fireproof would be on the lower ground all the way back.

"But there was worse than that, for there were three deep valleys—or two coombes and a valley—coming down to the river from that side, and he'd have to cross the mouths of them, out in the open, under fire from all the high ground. And the valley was just on the left of where he was now with the Burghers.

"But that's where his eye and his skill came in. For the koppie where he'd sent Wilshire outflanked the Boer attack, and as soon as the pom-pom opened, raking all the slope as the Boers came, his front was eased at once, though his left was getting it

hotter; and it was to the left he had to go, to cross the mile's width of the valley, to get on the great ridge the other side, the ridge that ran this way, bold and high, right to where the big bend of the river washed the foot from under it. And already the Boers were riding in clumps along that ridge to lay for him.

"That's where Glentie's position came in; for our high point was the continuation of the same ridge on our side, and we were even a bit higher, so that, as soon as the Captain was ready to cross the valley, the three Colt guns were talking. 'Now, boys,' said Glentie to his gunners. 'Lay along the crest of the ridge. McGurk, your gun take the near end of it—it's about two thousand yards—and you other two lay further along. Eschelon your fire, but wait till I give you the word!' And just as the Boers there were dismounting to fire he gave the word. 'Now, boys, squirt it in!'

"They did. You've seen the game many a time: seen the horses whirl to run before the sudden storm of bullets: seen the men jump up to catch their horses for fear they'd be left afoot; and then, as the bullets keep on ripping into them, and coming thicker still, you've seen them ride off to get cover somewhere. Same here—they were surprised from a flank and a position they had no cover against. They had to go, and go swift, and they went. In five minutes all that bull-backed ridge was swept clean for a mile, and the Captain and his sixty-two rode up the slope, and on to the crest, like riding off parade in a morning. 'Well,' says Glentie; 'he's passed the worst. He's got to the big bend. They'll have a job to cut him off now.'

"'Will they?' says I. 'I wish they would—but I know this length of this river, and I'm afraid he's only just come to the worst part. Look now, he's on the ridge, but there's that great coombe next, then another mountain of a ridge, then another coombe, and so on. Worst of all, there's the bends of the river. He'll fight his way back up the river bank, because he can't see which way it'll lead him, and when he's won three miles along it'll take him slap back into the main body of the Boers, within range of where he is at this minute.

“‘And if he could see it now it wouldn’t help him, for he couldn’t cut straight across; the hooks of the river are choked with Boers, the Boers that are keeping our left squadron so busy now, and if he tries to cut across he’ll have Boers all round him, front and flanks and rear, and lose his men in saving them. So he’s got to stick to the river and go round, while they keep the pivot. He’s got to work round the tyre of the wheel, while they hold the hub and every spoke as he comes to it.’

“‘I don’t know,’ said Glentie. ‘But I know he’ll beat them some way. If he keeps along the river I’ll keep his rear clear at any rate.’

“‘There’s that high kop yonder,’ says I. ‘If I can get the pom-pom on that, in time, it’ll clear the way to let him out on the flat country.’

“‘But that kop’s far on the other side of the river,’ says Glentie, which will tell you what the bends of the river were like.

“‘It is not,’ says I. ‘It’s on this bank, and the river cuts the foot of it. It’s four miles away, and it’s two from here back to the pom-pom. If he can last till I get the pom-pom yonder!’—and away I went.

“Young Palliser was coming with me, but I sent him back. ‘Go and help that left squadron. Do what you can to keep his front clear.’ ‘Right!’ he said, and he reined round and went.

“I got to the pom-pom and I told Wilshire. ‘Limber up, boys!’ he shouts at once. ‘Limber up and we’ll go like blazes!’

“And we did; we took that pom-pom over the ridges, swooping and whooping, sometimes three wheels on the ground and sometimes one, but just as we were flanging across the rear of where the Waggon Pup was here he came and halted us.

“It was no use telling him what we were doing. ‘Back you go!’ he shouts. ‘Why the devil did you come away! Here’s all the Boers now on the ground our Burghers were on, and they’re shooting across at us. Go back and rake them again.’

“Wilshire stared. ‘But, Colonel,’ he says, ‘they can’t get across to us. You’re going to withdraw in any case, and if you withdraw now, their shooting won’t matter: they’re only there

because they don't know the pont's sunk: they think we're going to cross.'

"Withdraw my men! Let them think I'm running away!' snorts the Waggon Pup. 'No more of your rot. Back you go to where you were sent: back now!' And it was no use; back Wilshire had to go, while the Waggon Pup flew to line his men along the ridge, and open a battle with men he couldn't get at and who couldn't get at him:—men a mile and a half away.

"But I streaked back to Glentie and told him. 'Lend me one gun, and I'll gallop it to the kop in time yet.'

"Take McGurk's,' said he, and McGurk and his mate were just slapping the gun apart to go, when up gallops the blasted Waggon Pup again, yapping to know why the guns weren't at work against those Boers he was having a battle with. And it was no use, the three guns had to swing and shoot across the straight.

"Glentie tried to argue with the Pup, and that made him stop longer. And I asked him if he wouldn't send word back to the column and have the guns sent forward to that koppie, for I knew the column would be well on the road by that time. But he told me that koppie was the other side of the river, and to shut my mouth. And then he noticed that the pom-pom wasn't using much ammunition, and off he went to damn Wilshire.

"Glentie watched him go, and his lip was trembling and his face white. 'I never was so near mutiny in my life,' he said, very slow. 'Here's the Captain hard put as ever he was in the world; hear it, even over this din! and he'll think I've deserted him. By God——!'

"Then his sergeant turned round to him, that American you'll remember. 'Look-a-hyer, Lootenant,' says he. 'I am agoin' to mutiny right here. The Waggon Pup may go to hell and shoot across all the rivers he'll find there, but I'm just lighting out, as fast as my old bronc can go, and tell the column, and get the two guns for'ard on to that hyere kop. They'll do the rest, and the Waggon Pup can court-martial his grandmother if he likes.' And up he swung and away he dusted.

“ ‘And I’ll go and make this left squadron do men’s work,’ I said to Glentie.

“He laid hold of my arm. ‘Do,’ he said. ‘Do! And if the Captain’s held up anywhere: if he’s fast where he can’t loose himself; send me word! Send me word and I’ll bring the guns; if I have to charge over the Waggon Pup, I’ll bring them!’

“ ‘Right!’ said I, and away with me.

“As soon as I got to the squadron here came young Palliser. ‘Tom,’ he said, ‘there’s a place down there where he might swim his fellows across,’ and he pointed down to a piece of straight course, just upstream from where it ran over a ledge of rocks, between a rocky spitz-kop on that side and a ridge of rocks on this. And there was a Kaffir kraal at the foot of the spitz-kop, and Kaffirs in it.

“Then the Captain and his men came in sight on the high bult above the big hook, and after that there was a wide high spread for him to cross; and it was full of folds and dead ground, full of Boers, where we couldn’t help him, and yet he came, working his way, move by move like clockwork, good to see.

“Then one move went wrong. He had them in four troops, and they were doing advance guard, and flank guard, and rear guard and main body, all in turn by short lengths, and then, all of a sudden I saw the one that was rear guard get up and gallop into the next, just when it should have held tightest, because it was on the highest ground.

“And then the Captain charged across to the two troops and made them gallop like blazes for the spitz-kop, and went and started the other troops the same, and took them to the spitz-kop and there he was, stuck; for the ground beyond it, that he would have had to work over, was just a wide slope, as bare as your hand, and a mile of it slanting naked towards him, with the Lord knows how much more that he couldn’t see.

“There was only one move he could make from there, and that was one that showed me what was in his mind. About three hundred yards up-stream from the koppie, and about two hundred from the river, was a little square kraal, of stone, and he sent a party to hold that. Says I to young Palliser: ‘That means that

he's waiting for us to help him out, and that his notion is that we shall have to keep the high ground busy from this side, while he steals out along the edge of the river below.'

" 'And we can't help him from here,' says Palliser. 'Our rifles will only reach him and not them. If we could get Glentie on to that far high koppie with his guns now !—we can't go ourselves, because we must keep them off that ridge, by the river there; for if once they got there, they could command his spitz-kop, they'd be so much higher. But Tom—I'm going to try that swimming place. My horse can swim like a Union liner—and at least I can help him if I get there, or fetch back his orders. Only I'll bet you what you like he'll just swim his fellows across and come up here smiling. I'm off, anyhow,' and he went.

"The spitz-kop being on the bank of the river, it wasn't a bad position, if it had only been just a little higher than the ridges round it. But it was just a little lower, and the one hope I had was that he'd set his men to swim the river at once, before the Boers pressed him too close. Only—suppose one or two of the horses couldn't swim, or couldn't swim well enough, and were carried down stream? Or if a few of the horses couldn't be got to face it—he'd be certain to stay there till the last man was across—'first man in, last out,' that was always his motto—Well, he'd be gone up then.

"So young Palliser put his horse at the river and swam him across, and went up through the dust of the bullets to where Old Fireproof was seeing to things, and he told him of the good place there was for swimming. And said Old Fireproof, 'That's the one thing that was wanted. But we can't try it just yet, for a whole black line of them have just come over that high ridge and got into some dead ground in front here, and they're creeping along these two ridges right and left, and already they can make that crossing place impossible, except for one man at a time. What we'll have to do is to shoot them out of the long grass there, and then in the lull we can come across the river. Thank God these men with me are Burghers too, and so they know where to look, and how to hit their mark—do you see that?' he said, and showed him three saddled horses running

this way from where the Boers were riding in the dead ground.

"But while they were talking, a horse beside them was hit, and it was Faddie's horse. And as soon as it dropped, Faddie cries out, 'Oh, how shall I get away now? What shall I do?'

"Old Fireproof looked at him. 'Swim the river,' says he. 'Get across the river out of the way, and then you'll not get us into any more messes.' It seems it was Faddie that had brought the rearguard rushing off its ground and broke up the whole move the Captain had in his mind.

"Then the fire grew hot as blazes, as the Captain had said, and all hands were tight at it, everyone busy and the Captain not watching the Faddie specimen. And Faddie looked round and saw the horse of his own Kaffir servant, and he seized it and dragged it down the kop by the rein, jumped into the saddle and spurred down to the river. His notion was that there was a drift there, and he tucked up his knees, to keep his feet dry, and pushed in, and the horse was such a steady one it made no more ado but swam across.

"I saw the sweep coming up the hill, and I stood up and waved to him, and he was so glad to get back to us on this side that he came right up. 'Where's the O.C.?' says he.

"But I stepped up, and I caught the fool by the arm. 'What's happening yonder?' says I. 'What are they doing? Who's hit?'

"'I don't know: and the Boers are coming on, and you can't see them where they're lying in the grass. All the fellows are sure to be killed, for the kop is so narrow that only a few can get cover to shoot. I'll get off and rest—it's not my horse. Mine was killed just now on the kop there, and so I took my bally nigger's horse. Let the black beggar swim.'

"I looked at him; one of the specimens they've been sending out. Militiamen they're supposed to be, and all they've had to do with the Militia is that somebody got them a commission in it, so they could come straight out here on the staff. And when he said that—'Let the black beggar swim for it,' I remembered

that the Captain wouldn't leave even a Kaffir behind at any price, knowing how they'd murder him if they got him, and my gorge came up. Out I flung my hand, and caught him by the throat and dragged his face to mine. 'D'ye hear our Colt guns?' I shouted in his teeth. 'Now mount and ride; go straight to the guns; tell Glentie I sent you; say the guns are wanted this way to save the Captain. Go! and if you go to the right or left, or if you speak to any man, or stop for any man, O.C. or other, then I'll find you and I'll not send you to the Devil—I'll send you straight up to the Lord God Almighty. Go now, you swine!—get away; quick!—or up you go to the Lord God.' And the fear of God was on him, and he went.

"In the fastest time that guns were ever galloped, here came Glentie. Fast, too, we got the guns into action; one here, one there, one yonder, and the lads poured the lead into that grass on the ridges as if the Lord God were behind them hurrying their work. And the fire of the Boers slackened, and here came the first ten of the Captain's men, swimming the river and not one making a mess of it. Then the next ten, and the next, until at last came young Palliser and the last ten. And the Captain was alone for a minute to empty his magazine quickly at the Boers and make them think there were still men with him, so that Palliser's lot should get a quiet passage.

"Then he rode down to come to the crossing place, and we all laughed to think that he was safe at last: safe out of another trap as usual. But as soon as he started, here came the Kaffir running back from the edge of the river, and holding his right arm in his left hand. He'd gone down to the river on one of the Boer horses that had run down within reach, and there the horse had baulked for a minute, and in that minute they marked him, and killed the horse and wounded him in the arm, so that he couldn't swim if he wanted to. And he was asking what he should do now.

"The Captain just jumped down from his horse, helped the Kaffir into the saddle with a heave and a swing; started him off to the river with a smack on the quarters; and then ran back himself to catch another of the Boer horses—a dun with black

points—that was snatching up the grass by the foot of the kop, in his fright of the bullets. And that's when it happened.

“For when the Captain snatched the rein, and flung it over the horse's neck, and caught the mane, and slapped his foot into the stirrup and his hand on the bow to mount, he was just in the way of the bullet meant for the horse, and down he went—him of all men!—downed at last—downed at last!

“We all saw it—Lord God! we all saw it! Even the new men saw it and yelled with the rest of us. And guns and men and Burghers and all of us jumped up, and mounted, and went down that slope for the river like madmen: like steel devils that bullets would make madder. And through all the cursing and the crying out it was then I heard the blasted guns open from the big kop now, when it didn't matter any more whether they opened or went back to camp. ‘Smack! smack!’ we heard them, and the cough of the bursting shells—too late. And before we got to the river more shells were bursting, and the Boers were up and going, fearing a trap, and the bullets were done—why not? Why not the flaming war itself done now, after that?

“Two men were in front of me when we got to the river, and one I flung out of the saddle and the other I stuck the muzzle under his armpit. ‘First! I'm first!’ I blazed out. ‘Are you?’ yells he, and he snatched his rifle round, but I was in the river already, and he might shoot and be damned. And all the way across he was trying to catch up with me, and wanting me to turn and let him shoot me, but I hadn't time for fooling, and I was first to the Captain.

“Down I jumped and over him I stood. ‘On you go, you swines! Up you go and shoot! Up you go and charge and get in with the steel. On!’—and they looked at him and me as they came up, and they parted at us like two lines of track, and away they went up the rise, and hell was loose up there.

“Down I knelt over the Captain, all in a blazing fury at him, and I stuck my face into his ear as he lay face down, and I was

yelling and cursing at him for getting hit : I could have smashed him with the butt for being hit ; and he just turned his face, and lifted his hand and put it on my forehead, and he said, ' Ah ! serjeant-major ! ' he said ; just that ; and he smiled like a damned saint—the man that made me a woman the minute I saw him down.

" But I saw the sweat on his face : the death-sweat on the death-grey ; and I cried out on him, ' Captain ! Captain ! What ha' you done ! What did you do this morning that you should get the bullet ? You ! '

" ' I've been hit before in other wars,' he said, and the smile was on him that was weakening me. ' There was no need for me to have done anything this morning : death doesn't come like that ! God isn't caring about that. He sends us here, and all He's troubling about, after that, is watching how we go on till death drops us.'

" But I wasn't following him into that feldt. I backed on to my own ground. ' What's going to come of the regiment now ? ' says I. ' Who is there now to command the regiment ? '

" ' Five hundred men—if the Government wanted—but they don't—or they wouldn't drive them to look other ways for a living.' And then he turned his face down again to rest.

" And then his words came in Welsh, for his death was on him. ' I'm not beaten ! I'm dead, but I'm not beaten ! And I have a son—and my wife knows—and she understands—she's splendid. I've never failed a trust—never given in—she won't ; she's God's making ! '

" And with that word he went out of consciousness, for all that he muttered after that, now and then, was of other things and other days I'd no key to. Only at the last he woke again, but he couldn't lift his head, or move, and it was in a thick whisper that he said—' My son !—the vision—let him follow the vision—all his life—the vision ! '

" And so he died, and we buried him there on the spitz-kop, and I made magic on the grave so the Kaffirs from the kraal wouldn't meddle with it. And we all went back to camp, and the Waggon Pup took Faddie over to Old Donkin, the column

commander, to show him what a narrow escape he'd had, and Donkin smiled and asked them to have a drink—he knew: the American had told him. And we trekked down the river, two days, and crossed at Villiersdorp, and came on here, leaving Old Fireproof yonder, dead: dead and buried; and the fool columns keep on crawling across the feldt; still crawling and cracking off the fool ammunition, as if it meant anything—Hell to it all!”

As the serjeant-major broke off, I spoke to the doctor. “Well, and what do you think of it all? What do you think of being the finest man and the finest fighter you ever met, and then to finish like that? Is it what you expected?”

“It is not,” broke out the doctor, and he stood to his feet in emphasis, and his eyes were shining. “It is not—because this is the right finish: right to the bone. It’s all the things I expected that are wrong. This is the right end: the splendid end; the only end for him. And, if you think it over, it’s wonderful luck. He had to die some day, and how could he die better?—dying to keep faith with men; men that had been sent over by a fool: dying to save even the Kaffir that trusted him and came to him for help.

“And he was come to his full manhood long ago, anyhow: he was a man to the marrow of his bones. God will get a straight and clear report from him; for he’ll stoop and he’ll map it all out, tracing it with his finger in the dust at the feet of God, and he’ll tell Him just how the world lies; how he found it, and how he left it. And the Lord God will look at him, and give him the nod, and say, ‘Right, Captain! It seems quite clear; and now you’d better rest awhile till I call you.’ And he’ll salute and go, straight as steel, and quiet as steel, and he’ll sleep sound, for he knows his honour is brighter than steel is sometimes kept. No, it’s not as I expected it would be; it’s so much better than that: it’s right.”

“Well,” took up the serjeant-major, “it’s done. Right or wrong, it’s done, and he’s dead. And I’m going down to Cape Town, and the chaplain will break the news to her, and say the things that should be said, and the doctor will give her the

medicine that's to pull her round—that's what I thought. And I'm going to marry Gaynor, and go home with the Captain's wife and baby to Llys Rono in Trevalar, and I'll be at the upbringing of the little lad, and my wife'll look after his mother. Christ! I wish we were there now, and away from this blasted ruin of a country!"

"Right," said the doctor. "You'll come down with us on this hospital train, for you're sick enough. And, padre, you'll come too."

"I will," I said. "I am done with this country too!"

* * * * *

There is no need to go further, and add the details of our sorrowful return to the house in Tamboer's Kloof, nor of our voyage home and our first days at Llys Rono, where my aunt helped us so much; though, if it were needed, I could add many pages of the brave life they are all living there now—the widowed mother, and the serjeant-major and his wife, all there seeming as they were trustees, in their degrees, of the charge left them by the Captain to bring up his little son aright. But I leave all that: I know the reader will picture it all without help: the grey mountains behind, the bright sea in front; the grey old house, granite without and oak within, the old-world garden, the legends and traditions, the old-world folk and the hopes of all on the centre of it all, the heir of the one who lies on the rocky sun-baked koppie by the bends of the dun Faal River. Yet I may add one thing: a thing that explains itself; a letter I received within a fortnight of my landing on my second return from South Africa.—

"DEAR SIR,

"The enclosures you sent me are the last straw. Of course he had no chance to destroy the keepsakes after he had left for South Africa, though I don't doubt he would have done it as soon as he got back. But I'm done with it all. Now he's dead it seems such piteous piffle to be living, with the chit-chat, and the paint and powder, and the scent and the stink of it all. And what's the use of trying to be good?"

It's no good: it's twaddle! So it's just a choice for me between a convent and a prison—any place where they'll take my liberty from me and make me live according to rule. *He'd* have gone to prison if he'd been like that—that was his way, but the prison dress is too ugly, and I'm not plucky enough; I haven't backbone enough; so I'm going to go to a convent. If he hadn't had a son I might have stood it better, but I can't stand thinking that he had one, and it's not mine. It ought to have been mine, and it might have been mine, if I'd only had sense enough. But that's not the real reason either—it's that I never could stir him to master me. If I'd managed that, I wouldn't be going into a convent now, beautiful for nothing; dead, and no son ever come of me. It's all a dreary mistake.

“Yours——”

And the signature was that of “the other woman.”

But to-morrow I start to spend a month with them all at Llys Rono, the mother and her little son, the serjeant-major and his wife, and all the brave folk who have but one hero in this life—“Old Fireproof.” There is only happiness there—hope and the future.

THE END.



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